Studies on the Heritagisation of "Nüshu" in China: Heritage Discourses and Identity-Making

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by

Xihuan Hu

School of Media, Communication and Sociology

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Abstract

This study explores the identity-making of heritage participants and discourse construction of intangible cultural heritage Nüshu (a female created scripts and culture in ancient China, now a national intangible cultural heritage) in contemporary China. This study investigates two heritage discourses in the heritage community: the official heritage discourse and the folk heritage discourse. It demonstrates how participants of these discourses shape, legitimate, and reinforce their heritage identity through different authenticating mechanisms to declare their authenticity in heritage. The theoretical framework of this research links identity, discourse, and heritage, considering the authorised heritage discourse (AHD) and critical heritage studies (CHS) in Chinese context. It also draws on the connection between (intangible) heritage authenticity and cool/hot authentication and how these factors matter heritage identity-making and discourse construction. This study employed multiple methods to obtain the research data, including qualitative in-depth interviews with 25 heritage participants, participant observation in the fieldwork, and a four-year digital ethnography of several digital heritage social media. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed for data analysis.

The findings of the research offer insights to the heritage-making and identity-making in the Nüshu ICH community. It shows how Nüshu has become a heritage site of continuing power conflicts among its stakeholders. This study demonstrates how hierarchical authentication and hierarchical identity are made in Chinese intangible cultural heritage. It reveals the relation between "cool" authentication and authenticity declaration and heritage industry construction. The analysis argues the hierarchical, authoritative, and political-economic oriented features of China's official heritage discourse. Then, this study highlights the significance of digitalisation of heritage practices and demonstrates how "hot" authentication is achieved by the folk heritage community through democratic election of folk transmitters on social media. The analysis proves that digital technology and social media have given the non-elites,

indigenous members a space to shape and speak for their heritage identity. Heritage practices of the folk participants in virtual community demonstrates a bottom-up, grassroot heritage autonomy with democratic characteristics. This study makes theoretical contributions to Nüshu studies, AHD and CHS theories, and identity-making theories in heritage.

Acknowledgement

Abbreviations

ACHS   Association of Critical Heritage Studies

AHD   Authorised Heritage Discourse

CDA   Critical Discourse Analysis

CHS   Critical Heritage Studies

ICH   Intangible Cultural Heritage

ISO   International Organisation for Standardisation

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Glossary of Terms

Bearer: a member of a community who recognises, reproduces, transmits, transforms, creates and forms a certain culture in and for a community. A bearer can, in addition, play one or more of the following roles: practitioner, creator and custodian.

Heritage practice: heritage activities that manifest ever-changing concepts, knowledge and skills, related, among other things, to social relations, status, methods of decision-making, conflict resolution and collective aspirations.

Heritage community: a community that distinguishes itself from other communities by its own cultural heritage or cultural heritage design.

Indigenous community: a community whose members consider themselves to have originated in a certain territory. This does not preclude the existence of more than one indigenous community in the same territory.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH): a practice, representation, expression, knowledge or skill considered by UNESCO to be part of a place's cultural heritage.

Folk: common people as opposed to ruling classes or elites.

Practitioner: a member of a community who actively reproduces, transmits, transforms, creates and forms culture in and for the community by performing and otherwise maintaining social practices based on specialised knowledge and skills.

Transmission: transferring social practices and ideas to another person or persons, especially to younger generations, through instruction, access to documental sources or by other means.

Transmitter (传人): a person who transmits intangible cultural heritage knowledge and practices from one person to another. Another relevant phrase, 'natural transmitter' (自然传人), which means women who retained the traditional form of inheritance and whose Nüshu knowledge was delivered by their female predecessors.

WeChat Official Account (公众号): WeChat's official means of providing a way of information dissemination for media and individuals. The main function is to convey information to users on WeChat (functions like newspapers and magazines, providing news and entertainment). It is available to individuals, media, enterprises, governments or other organisations.

Bianzhi (编制): the establishment, personnel and leading positions of administrative and public institutions approved by the central and local organisation and administration organs of the People's Republic of China. Also includes the state-owned enterprise organisations and personnel approved by the labour administrative department of the people's government. The staffing is divided into three categories: national administrative staffing, institution staffing and enterprise staffing.

Guanxi (关系): the fundamental power dynamic in personalised social networks and a crucial system of beliefs in Chinese culture.

Hetonggong(合同工): contract workers in China who are the short-term workers recruited by enterprises and institutions through signing contracts.

Tizhi (体制): the system related to organisational form, which is limited to the state organs and enterprise units with a hierarchical relationship between the upper and lower levels.

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Chapter One: Research Context and Field of Study

1.1 Why this Research?

I first encountered Nüshu in 2015 when I was studying in the UK for a Master's Degree in Translation Studies and had a class about minority languages and translation. When I was searching for information for a course assignment, I found that that there is a female-specific character called 'Nüshu (female scripts, in Chinese: 女书)' in China. This assignment brought me into the world of Nüshu. I was moved by these mysterious, stunning, and feminine scripts, and yearned to learn more about the culture and its scripts. I searched for any books, articles, novels, films and concerts related to the culture. I found that throughout history, Nüshu was popular and used by women in several villages in the southwestern frontier of Hunan Province, China. I originate from Xiangtan in Hunan Province. While studying in the UK, I was aroused by this female culture from my hometown. By discovering this culture, I was able to alleviate my homesickness and stimulate my sense of identity as a Hunanese woman.

During 2015 and 2016, I studied Nüshu from the perspective of translation and linguistics. I gradually realised that all the Nüshu fictional works, films and documentaries and so on produced by Chinese and non-Chinese producers seemed to present an imagined, harmonious and peaceful gendered Nüshu community. Until I read the fieldwork reports of the Japanese Nüshu scholar Orie Endo and Taiwanese Nüshu anthropologist Feiwen Liu, the 'imagined community' in my mind started to be deconstructed. Orie Endo recorded her visits to the Nüshu region from 1993 to 2011 on her website 'World of Nüshu (女书世界)'. These reports demonstrate how a simple and deprived village in southern China dramatically changed because it is the birthplace of Nüshu, how this region attracted attention and obtained funds and policies from the authorities and how women in this village are granted titles because they are the inheritors of this culture. My Nüshu research later experienced a 'sociological turn' as my understanding of this culture extended.

Feiwen Liu's research embodies a 'sociological turn'. She initially devoted herself to Nüshu's female writing and narrative forms (Liu, 2010a; 2007; 2005; 2003; 1997). In her recent research, Liu began to pay attention to the increasingly cultural and political forces entering the Nüshu field, which have had great impacts on the culture and its bearers (Liu, 2014). Nüshu's function has changed from 'su ke lian (诉可怜, meaning vouching for pity)' to a kind of specialised cultural activity under political regulation or for economic purposes. Nüshu bearers' dominance over the culture is weakened, placing Nüshu and its transmitters at the crossroads of tradition and modernity (Liu, 2015; 2017). In recent decades, this culture has been in construction and transformation due to various social-cultural forces. The real Nüshu world may not be as uncontaminated and unsophisticated as people expect but a field full of power struggles. This study aims to bring brand-new directions and contributions to not only the Nüshu research but also the sociological and heritage research.

Since Nüshu was revived in academia in the 1980s, scholars have made remarkable contributions to Nüshu studies, especially in linguistics, literature and anthropology (see Gong, 2007, 1995, 1983; Zhao, 2005, 1995; Gong and Zhao, 1986; Chiang, 1995; Silber, 1995). However, the present research is not concerned with following linguistic or literary directions, but the tendency that, in the past 30 years, Nüshu has been constructed and reshaped in a broad social context in China and the world. It is shaped by globalisation, which is a process in which world heritages are becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of massively increased cultural exchange. Nüshu is also influenced by nationalisation, which is the process of transforming private assets of heritages into public assets by bringing them under the public ownership of a national government or state. Nüshu is further affected by institutionalisation, which is the process of embedding the conception of heritage within social constructs, especially the official organs. The heritage is inevitably influenced by commercialisation, which means utilising heritage in commerce, making its products available on the market. In such a context, the Nüshu community today is no longer a nameless space hidden in

women's boudoirs for communicating women's emotions, but a heritage field overwhelmed by political, economic and cultural contentions. This study will concentrate on heritage research from a critical, sociological perspective.

The rationale and feasibility of this research can be confirmed with the value of Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) (see Daly and Chan, 2015; Emerick, 2014; Winter, 2013; Harrison, 2013; Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011; Smith, 2006) as the theoretical basis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see Hou and Wu, 2017; Waterton, Smith and Campbell, 2006; Smith, 2006; Fairclough et al. 2004, 2003) as the methodological basis. CHS and CDA inspired the design of this research. CHS (detailed discussion in Chapter Two) focuses on the performance, negotiation and shaping process of cultural heritage at present (Harrison, 2013; Emerick, 2014; Smith, 2006). It reveals the relationships among heritage participants and heritage subjects and the power involved. Hence, contemporary heritage as a 'struggle over power' (Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011: 4). CDA (detailed discussion in Chapter Three) is developed from discourse theories (Fairclough, 2003, 2001, 2000; Fairclough et. al, 2004; Hall, 2001; Foucault, 1991) and studies the use of language (Taylor, 2001; Wetherell, 2001) and the inter-relationship between language and practice (Hall, 2001: 72). This research takes CDA as the main analysis method, exploring the power relations and the hierarchical authentication and hierarchical identities in Chinese Nüshu heritage. This study reveals the dominated and marginalised roles in heritage identity-making and the negotiation and resistance of the participants in the heritage field.

Based on the above initial considerations in terms of the concepts, theories, methods and research objectives, the feasibility of this study can be established. This study does not focus on the 'past' aspects of the Nüshu culture such as the scripts, literature, customs or its history. This study investigates how Nüshu is 'made' to be an intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as ICH) in the contemporary Chinese social environment and how participants in this field shape, reshape and negotiate their heritage identities. By conducting qualitative research, this study reveals the power

interactions among the Nüshu people to demonstrate the fact that the Nüshu community is inherently dissonant. In this field, struggles and conflicts never disappear. Various social forces are continually reconstructing Nüshu as a 'proper' Chinese national cultural heritage project. Heritage, in this sense, is never a static material, but a dynamic process of being shaped.

1.2 The Context of Heritage Nüshu

This chapter first explains what Nüshu is and how it became a Chinese ICH by analysing its historical, geographic and cultural changes. This analysis presents Nüshu's representation as a culture and heritage at the local, national and global levels. This chapter demonstrates the cultural background of this research.

1.2.1 What is Nüshu?

This section demonstrates the historical and geographical background of the Nüshu culture. The introduction presents Nüshu's discovery, regions of transmission and gender characteristics. The analysis highlights that Nüshu, as an ICH, has undergone constant cultural and social transformations in recent decades under the impact of the globalisation, nationalisation and institutionalisation of Chinese heritage.

Rediscovering Nüshu

In 1982, Chinese scholar Gong Zhebin discovered several special scripts during his fieldwork in a Yao[1] village in southern Hunan Province. The villagers in the Jianghua County told him that these scripts were written by the elder women in the surrounding villages on fans, women's belts and men's purses. Some of their female relatives used to sing songs written in the scripts on the fans. It was suggested to Gong to find these scripts in the adjacent Jiangyong County. Upon travelling there, he met people who could recognise these scripts and collected several Nüshu original texts.

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[1] 'The Yao people' is a government classification for various minorities in China. They are one of the 55 officially recognised ethnic minorities in China and reside in the mountainous terrain of the southwest and south.

As early as the 1950s, when the People's Republic of China had just been founded, a folk researcher named Zhou Shuoyi had already studied these scripts. However, due to the continuous political movements in that historical period in China, Zhou was classified as a rightist in the Anti-rightist Movement[2], and was criticised (批斗)[3] and his properties were confiscated (抄家)[4] in the Cultural Revolution[5]. This political turmoil not only stagnated his Nüshu research, but he also lost most of the Nüshu originals he collected. After the Cultural Revolution, Zhou returned to his hometown of Jiangyong to continue his Nüshu studies. At that time, most of the Nüshu original texts were lost or destroyed, making it extremely difficult to restart the Nüshu research.

According to Gong's research (1983), the scripts were spread over Jiangyong County and its adjacent areas. Most of the scripts were based on Chinese scripts (汉字). Nüshu scripts are monosyllabic phonetic characters, which means that one syllable can signify a group of words with the same sound but different meanings. The language that Nüshu records is the local dialect in the Jiangyong area. Nüshu is usually written on paper, cloth or fans using bamboo sticks or brush pens, from top to bottom and left to right, without punctuation. These scripts look slanted and diamond-shaped (see Figure 1). Nüshu in history was widespread among the local women in Jiangyong region, while men did not know or care about it. The local people used to call them 'women's writing

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[2] The Anti-rightist Campaign (simplified Chinese: 反右运动）in the People's Republic of China, which lasted from 1957 to 1959, was a campaign to purge alleged 'Rightists' within the Communist Party of China (CPC) and abroad. The definition of rightists was not always consistent, sometimes including critics of the left of the government, but officially referred to those intellectuals who appeared to favour capitalism and were against collectivisation.

[3] 'Criticised in the Cultural Revolution' means a 'struggle session' (simplified Chinese: 批斗), which was a form of public humiliation and torture that was used by the Communist Party of China (CPC) at various times in the Mao era, particularly in the years immediately before and after the establishment of the People's Republic of China and during the Cultural Revolution. The aim of a struggle session was to shape public opinion and humiliate, persecute or execute political rivals and those deemed class enemies. (See Lipman, J. N., Lipman, J. N. & Harrell, S. (Eds.). Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counterculture. SUNY Press. Pp. 154–157.)

[4] The simplified Chinese '抄家' means to search homes and confiscate property.

[5] The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement in the People's Republic of China from 1966 until 1976. Its stated goal was to preserve Chinese Communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society and to re-impose Mao Zedong Thought (known outside China as Maoism) as the dominant ideology in the CPC.

(妇女文字)', or 'Nüshu (女书)' for short (Gong, 1983: 123). Zhao (1995:15) argues that Nüshu is one of the Chinese dialects. This 'dialect script' has two meanings: first, Nüshu is a script of a regional dialect; second, Nüshu is a gender script of a specific social group (ibid).

Figure 1. Nüshu Scripts in Nüshu Ecological Museum in Jiangyong (photograph taken by the author in August 2018)

Origin and Characteristics

Examining its social attributes, Nüshu was neither official nor religious. The employers and inventors of Nüshu were ordinary peasant women (Zhao, 1995: 29). The origin of Nüshu remains a mystery and has become one of most controversial issues in Nüshu studies. The earliest documented record of Nüshu is a report named *Investigation Notes of Hunan Counties* (湖南各县市调查笔记) published in 1931. The report shows that, in 1905, women worshipped the 'Gupo Goddess (姑婆女神)' and sung Nüge (女歌, which means female songs) in the Huashan Temple[6]. Those women held paper fans decorated with the 'diamond-shaped scripts'.

One of Nüshu's customs, 'Scripts Burning After Death (人死书焚)' and the sweeping devastation of Nüshu originals and customs during the Cultural Revolution have made

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[6] Huashan Temple (花山庙) was a women's activity centre until 1949. There were Gupo Goddesses inside. Women regularly came to worship the goddesses with their Nüshu paper fans and booklets each year.

it difficult for researchers to obtain earlier works. Zhao (1995: 38) suggests that Nüshu as a complete language recording system has a history of hundreds of years. Nüshu may have been created after the Ming Dynasty (from A.D. 1368 to A.D. 1644). Although the origin of Nüshu is still unclear, its creation, formation and refinement must have involved a long historical process. Many Nüshu works have proven that Nüshu was long used as the emotional ties among local Jiangyong women (Zhao, 1995: 36).

When Nüshu was rediscovered in the 1980s, a small number of local women could still read the scripts. Scholars collected approximately 500 Nüshu texts from their literary creation and translation. These texts include four-line poems, long autobiographical songs and narrative *changben* (唱本, which means song books) (Idema, 2011: 5). Women made use of Nüshu to write down their life experiences and biographies, such as Gao Yinxian, Hu Cizhu and other women's Nüshu narratives and biographies (Liu, 2015: 47; Broussard, 2008). There are Nüshu works detailing Chinese history, such as the *Japanese Army's Invasion into Jiangyong during the Sino-Japanese War* (Liu, 2015: 28–29). Nüshu was also inscribed by women when they were establishing 'sworn sister (结拜姐妹)[7]' relationships, during which women's Nüshu pieces were their most beloved gifts to each other (Liu, 2004b). According to Zhao (2005), most of the remaining Nüshu texts are letters exchanged between sisters, such as Songs of Sisters (结交姐妹歌), Three-day Wedding Books (三朝书), marriage songs (婚嫁歌), local ballads, sacrificial songs, riddles, as well as traditional Chinese literary works translated into Nüshu.

After the establishment of the PRC, a series of 'Anti-illiteracy Campaigns (扫盲运动)' were carried out throughout the country. Women in Jiangyong area started to be included in China's official, modern education system, which meant they were allowed to learn Chinese characters (汉字) like men and communicate with each other in the

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[7] Sworn sisters and brothers (in Chinese: 结拜姐妹/兄弟) is an old communicative custom in Chinese society. People who are not related by blood, with certain ceremonies, can become brothers and sisters because they share similar interests and show closeness.

official Mandarin language (普通话). Nüshu gradually dropped its fundamental utility: emotional communication. Nowadays, the few people who are proficient in Nüshu, such as those who have been officially recognised as Nüshu translators, seldom write Nüshu for emotive sistership communication. Nüshu, which has been known as one of China's national ICH items, is more likely to be written for political, diplomatic or economic purposes, such as the Nüshu version of the *Constitution of the Communist Party of China* and the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*, as well as the handicrafts and calligraphies sold in the souvenir stores in the Nüshu museum.

Nüshu in Jiangyong Region: Past and Present

Jiangyong County is located in Hunan Province, Southern China. It borders Guangdong Province to the east and Guangxi Province to the west (see Figure 2). The county is in a basin and surrounded by hills. In history, Nüshu was mainly used in the northern Jiangyong County and the nearby villages along the Xiaoshui River, such as the Puwei (蒲尾), Tongkou (桐口) and Jingtian (荆田) villages. In the past, with Jiangyong girls marrying the boys of the surrounding villages, Nüshu could be disseminated to Dao County (道县) in the north, Jianghua County (江华乡) in the east, Taochuan County (桃川) in the south and Dayuan County (大远) in the west (see Figure 2) (Zhao, 1995: 5–6). Historically, Nüshu had a wide-ranging circulation in Jiangyong and its neighbouring counties. Since Nüshu gained the world's attention in the 1980s, the peace of these counties and villages has been fragmented. Jiangyong County, as one of the central areas of historical Nüshu transmission, has transformed dramatically.

Figure 2.   Location of Jiangyong in China (screenshot from Google Earth and Google
         Maps on 3 June, 2020).

Figure 3. The 'Nüshu Island' Area in Puwei (Pumei) Village and the Nüshu Ecological Museum (screenshot from Google Maps on 19 March, 2020)

A 'Nüshu Island' Tourism Development Plan has been designed and implemented with the determination of the Jiangyong local governments. They chose Puwei Village (蒲尾村) as the central area for tourism development. The Nüshu Ecological Museum is built in this village (see Figure 3). The original name of the village has been changed by the local authorities from 'Puwei Village (蒲尾村)' to 'Pumei Village (普美村)' for tourism promotion. In Chinese, 'pu' (蒲) is a kind of herbaceous plant growing in the water and 'wei (尾)' means 'tail'. The term 'puwei (蒲尾)' refers to the tail of a kind of aquatic plant, which indicates that this village is located near the water. The replacement term 'pumei (普美)' in Chinese refers to 'universal beauty'. The local authorities have attempted to attract more tourists to this 'universally beautiful Nüshu village' through the renaming. Additionally, the local authorities have been investing in the construction of the village since 2000 to improve the tourism experience. Roads, houses and other

infrastructures are newly built or renovated in the village. After decades of special investment and construction for cultural heritage tourism, the appearance of this village is now in great contrast with other nearby villages. Figure 4 shows a comparison of the constructions between the Nüshu Village and the neighbouring Village, Heyuan Village, where the old Nüshu Transmitter He Yanxin lives.

Figure 4.   The Nüshu Village and the Heyuan Village (photos taken by the author during the fieldwork between July and August 2018)

1.2.2 UNESCO and the Definition of 'Cultural Heritage'

This section explains how UNESCO's global heritage strategies have influenced China's heritage governance and resulted in a 'purposeful making' of Nüshu culture. This section demonstrates the context of this study from global to national and local perspectives.

In 1972, the definition of World Cultural Heritage was first proposed in *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* adopted by

UNESCO. The purpose of the *Convention* was to deal with the increased cultural destruction around the world. The *Convention* encourages the States Parties [8] to incorporate heritage protection into their national plans and establish institutions in charge of the protection, preservation and exhibition of cultural and natural heritage in their countries (Article 6).

However, the definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage was still ambiguous at that time, as the term 'cultural heritage' in the *Convention* mainly referred to monuments, groups of buildings and sites (Article 1). *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* was presented by UNESCO in 2001, which raised the awareness of ICH and encouraged communities to preserve intangible cultural expressions and bearers. Later in 2003, the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage was clarified by UNESCO in *Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.* Here Intangible Cultural Heritage means:

> 'The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. It concludes the following forms: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship' (Article 2).

At the national level, the *Convention* encourages the States Parties to specify policies on ICH and establish institutions in charge of ICH protection. The *Convention* supports states in taking appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures to achieve the protection and management of ICH (Articles 11–13). At the international level, the *Convention* proposes two ICH lists for project management: *Representative*

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[8] States Parties are countries that have adhered to the World Heritage Convention. They thereby agree to identify and nominate properties on their national territory to be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. See detailed introduction via https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/

List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* (Articles 16 and 17).

UNESCO's *Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage* was proposed in 2008, which offers detailed official instruction in accomplishing the intentions presented in the *Convention*. The *Directives* clarify the criteria for inscription on the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* and the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* (Paragraphs 1–65). It also highlights the safeguarding and sustainable development of ICH at the national level from four major aspects: inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, environmental sustainability and ICH and peace (Paragraphs 170–197). This document emphasises the dynamic nature of ICH and requires ICH communities, groups and individuals to be respected and to be the main beneficiaries of all kinds of ICH plans and policies (Paragraphs 170 and 171). The form of intellectual property rights in ICH is proposed in this document. It encourages States to take appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures to protect the rights of ICH communities, groups and individuals through the application of intellectual property rights and other forms of legal protection (Paragraph 173).

By studying the above strategic documents formulated by UNESCO for safeguarding heritage, it can be found that UNESCO underlines the involvement and significance of the individuals, groups and communities who create, preserve and transmit heritages. These documents imply that the value and meaning of cultural heritage should not be eradicated during the process of social-cultural development. Transmitters and their communities demand privilege and freedom in heritage promotion and development to retain cultural bearers' creativity and the sustainability of heritage. Over-commercialisation is opposed by UNESCO. UNESCO's initiatives in World Cultural Heritage have exerted significant global impacts, while hundreds of Member States

have responded to UNESCO's grand plans for cultural preservation. However, some scholars have proposed their views on these heritage plans from a critical perspective.

Scholars have argued that the advocated global heritage initiatives are a project of legitimisation that gives authorities certain influence on culture and heritage (Smith, 2006; Blake, 2001). Such legitimisation defines what heritage is, how and why it is significant and how it should be managed and used (Smith, 2006: 55). According to Smith (2006: 99–100), UNESCO not only recreates a number of cultural heritages of world significance, but also internationally authorises and legitimises a heritage discourse from the perspective of Europeanism. The process of 'listing' is an act of heritage management in which a sense of universal 'human identity' is created (ibid: 99). Blake (2001: 46) believes that UNESCO's heritage plan's proposal of the term 'masterpiece' may lead to the emergence of a cultural hierarchy. These selected heritage projects are endowed with the concept of property, that is, the value of these heritages of world significance are owned by the world (Carman, 2005). Handler's study (2003: 363) points out that the term 'property' reinforces the fact that the cultural value of a place or material is to be captured or frozen. The listing or safeguarding of heritage inevitably causes certain cultures to be frozen or rigid (Amselle, 2004; van Zanten, 2004). The term 'living culture' is often highlighted in UNESCO's documents, especially that of ICH, to refer to the cultural practices by participants and to distinguish them from the 'dead' cultural artefacts (van Zanten, 2004: 28–29). UNESCO claims that their *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* is designed to protect the vitality of the listed items. However, some scholars have questioned whether a culture with vitality needs to be protected (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: 56).

UNESCO's policies above, as well as the critical perspectives developed by heritage scholars, form the basis of this study of Nüshu as a heritage community. Nüshu's transformation in the past 30 years is inevitably influenced by UNESCO's strategies in terms of heritage governance. Previous studies have led this study to pay close attention

to the recent disputes on heritage ownership and property rights, the authorisation of cultural transmitter identities and the 'legalisation' of heritage claimed by different stakeholders. These factors are worth considering when analysing the recent 'heritagisation' of Nüshu in China.

Nevertheless, the heritage-making of Nüshu can hardly be directly affected by UNESCO's actions as it is a culture located in China's inland villages. A series of national-level heritage governance institutions are an 'intermediary' between the Nüshu community and UNESCO. Nüshu is experiencing a 'dual construction' by both heritage globalisation and nationalisation. The next section further presents how China has perceived UNESCO's heritage initiatives at the national level, how these initiatives have become the policy foundation for China's heritage governance and how heritage governance and practices have influenced Nüshu at the local level.

1.2.3 ICH in China—A National Perspective

When UNESCO proposed *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* in 1972, the People's Republic of China was experiencing a Cultural Revolution in which all kinds of tangible and intangible cultural heritages in the country were criticised as 'backwards' and 'feudal' (Zhu and Maags, 2020: 10). Records of traditional Chinese thoughts and customs were stigmatised and destroyed on a large scale. Nüshu was almost abolished during this period and most original objects were burned.

Until the late 1970s, when China turned to the Reform and Opening up (改革开放), its cultural policy gradually opened. In 1985, China became a party to the UNESCO Convention, which meant that UNESCO's value framework on cultural heritage started to be accepted by the PRC (Zhu and Maags, 2020: 10). Maags (2018) suggests that the PRC has selectively understood, interpreted and implemented these values, rather than blindly transplanting them. At the international level, the PRC was eager to see its cultural heritage acknowledged worldwide, so it actively participated in UNESCO's

heritage nominations. In 1987, several of China's historical sites, such as the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, were listed in the World Heritage List. At the beginning of the 21st century, China witnessed a 'heritage fever' that has allowed the national cultural heritages to be increasingly valued by the government at all levels.

In terms of ICH, China joined UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2004. The first ICH regulation at the national *Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage* was promulgated in 2005. The working principle emphasises government leadership, social participation, combination of forces and long-term planning (Article 2). This regulation demonstrates that the earliest state-level ICH policy has already decided the dominant role of the state power.

In 2005, the *Notice of the State Council on Strengthening Protection of Cultural Heritages* was officially ratified. This document encourages governments at all levels to inaugurate special agencies to safeguard and supervise heritage projects, designate heritage protection plans and implement them strictly (Article 3.1). This document suggested that a specific listing system for China's ICH should be in development. Such a listing system includes four levels: national, provincial, municipal and county levels (Article 4.4). The document also emphasises accelerating the legal development of cultural heritage, national buildings, local and departmental laws and regulations to promote the legalisation, institutionalisation and standardisation of heritage protection (Article 5.2).

Later in 2011, the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China* was announced. This national law has crucial implications for the development of ICH in China. It clarifies the investigation approach of ICH projects from a legal perspective, the declaration method of the listing of Representative ICH Projects and the inheritance and dissemination of ICH in China.

Although China joined UNESCO's Heritage Convention late, the party state has already offered a number of astonishing ideas, concepts, policies and plans (Rees, 2012). China has achieved extraordinary results in world heritage safeguarding. Currently, China has inscribed 55 sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List and 42 ICH items to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity[9]. China has also formed an ICH system with 1,372 national ICH projects and a number of provincial, municipal and county-level ICH items[10].

Pendlebury (2015: 437) suggests that heritage is a significant national symbol. It proliferates national thoughts and reinforces national identity and collective identity, thus helping to promote social inclusion, economic development and localism. Barmé (2000: 236) finds that China is promoting cultural nationalism to strengthen its socialist ideology, while weakening Western culture's proliferation in China. Through the process of heritage-making, the great past of the Chinese nation is constantly reaffirmed so that the self-confidence and national identity of its people can be enhanced (Zhu and Maags, 2020: 12). The essence of China's passionate attitude towards heritage in recent decades is to boost its legitimacy in power (Blumenfield and Silverman, 2013).

The above sections present the meaning-making of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' by UNESCO and China. Scholars' critical views on the establishment of such a global heritage scheme are considered. Nüshu is indeed transforming under the context of heritage globalisation, nationalisation and institutionalisation. The following analysis shows how the heritage conforms to the global and national heritage governance frameworks, from which the ambitions of local heritage authorities can be revealed.

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[9] Data from UNESCO Official Website: https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/cn/. Accessed on 3 January, 2021

[10] Data from Ichchina: http://www.ihchina.cn/project.html#target1. Accessed on 3 January, 2021

1.2.4 Local Ambitions on Heritage

Under China's specific heritage management mechanism, the most significant impact on Nüshu culture was in 2006 when 'Nüshu Customs' was inscribed on the *List of Representative Projects of National Intangible Cultural Heritage* (国家级非物质文化遗产代表性项目名录). After that, the protection and development of the Nüshu heritage began to follow a top-down hierarchy (this argument will be analysed in detail in Chapter Four). The Cultural Bureau of Jiangyong County was delegated as the head of department to safeguard the culture. The infrastructure of the Nüshu Island and the Nüshu Ecological Museum has significantly enhanced with the efforts of continuous investment.

Before Nüshu became a national ICH in 2006, the local governments and scholars had made great efforts to nationalise and globalise this heritage. Nüshu was listed in *China Archives Document Heritage List* (国档案文献遗产名录) in 2002 and *China National Folk Culture Protection Project* (中国民族民间文化保护工程) in 2003. In 2005, Nüshu was selected as the 'Most Gender Specific Language' by Guinness Book of World Records[11]. Then in 2009, Nüshu, as the only project of Hunan Province, was nominated to China's National Culture Department to apply for UNESCO's ICH inscription. However, Nüshu's application was rejected.

This failure did not stop Nüshu's globalisation process, but was regarded as an appearance of this heritage on a global, political and diplomatic stage. In the next few years, official Nüshu Transmitters kept participating in international cultural activities, such as the United Nations Chinese Day in 2012 and 2016, where they exhibited the Nüshu versions of *Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*. In 2017, the Nüshu written work

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[11] See the official website of Guinness World Records: https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/most-gender-specific-language

Civilisation Exchange and Mutual Appreciation (文明交流互鉴)[12] was presented to UNESCO at the 'Belt and Road' International Cooperation Summit Forum in Beijing, China. The above mentioned Nüshu compositions were written for specific political and diplomatic purposes. It seems that Nüshu, which is granted a national label, has inevitably become a symbolic tool for the authorities to achieve their specific purposes.

From UNESCO's global heritage initiatives to the perception of them at Chinese national and local levels, Chapter 1.2 provides a comprehensive contextual and background analysis for this study. It shows that Nüshu has been deemed to be a treasured national heritage. Its indigenous community and local heritage management authorities are given explicit policy supports and financial sponsorships. Given the context, this study is concerned with revealing how a top-down heritage governance framework is established inside the community and what impacts it has exerted on the heritage. The above analysis shows that Nüshu, as a national heritage project, may be involved in increasingly complicated power struggles. The feasibility of this research from a critical, sociological perspective can be rationalised. In the scope of Critical Heritage Studies, this study will critically explore the 'making' process of Nüshu in modern China, examining the effect of the stimuli of social-political and social-cultural power on the heritage.

1.3 Nüshu as an Indigenous Memory Community with Economic and Social Impact

Nüshu culture is one of the important elements to promote the connection of local collective memory. Collective memory refers to the shared pool of memories,

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[12] President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China put forward the concept of '文明交流互鉴' (Civilisation Exchange and Mutual Learning) for the first time in a speech at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on March 27, 2014. He noted that, first, civilisations have come in different forms, and such diversity has made exchanges and mutual learning among civilisations relevant and valuable. Second, civilisations are equal, and such equality has made exchanges and mutual learning among civilisations possible. Third, civilisations are inclusive, and such inclusiveness has given exchanges and mutual learning among civilisations the needed drive to move forward.

knowledge and information of a social group that is significantly associated with the group's identity (Roediger and Abel, 2015). Collective memory can be constructed, shared, and passed on by large and small social groups (ibid).

Nüshu culture, as a collective memory of the Jiangyong and adjacent areas, especially of the indigenous female groups, has been used as a local cultural resource to highlight local specialties and identity-making. By strengthening the relationship between culture and place, the local authorities try to awaken and strengthen the cultural identity and pride of the local communities and indigenous residents in the areas. A series of Nüshu culture related spaces were built. Nüshu ecological museum and Nüshu village are the most concentrated places for the preservation and exhibition of Nüshu culture and history. The interpretations in the museum introduces the general situation of Nüshu in Jiangyong, such as the cultural and geographical environment, descendants and customs of Nüshu, introduces the current situation of Nüshu research, such as Nüshu research experts, main papers and works at home and abroad, and also mentions the protection of contemporary Nüshu, the nomination of world and national heritage projects, and the development of Nüshu industry. The museum mainly contains Nüshu originals, Nüshu embroidery words and handicrafts, as well as items related to the life of women in the region in history. The museum is the most influential cultural place in Jiangyong and its adjacent areas. It has become an important cultural and educational place for educational institutions, enterprises, and public institutions in the region. Through the collection and dissemination of knowledge, museums help local communities retain local culture and awaken the memory of indigenous people, especially young people.

In addition to the museum as a fixed place, local festivals have become an increasingly important way to strengthen local culture and collective memory in recent years. Liao and Dai (2020) put forward that traditional festivals, as elements and carriers of collective memory, often need to be carried out continuously, while activities, memorial ceremonies and other traditional festivals often become important means of memory

inheritance. Jiangyong County organises Nüshu culture related festivals every year, including not only large-scale cultural activities held in the county, but also small-scale activities held in the countryside. For example, in September 2018, Jiangyong County held the first Nüshu Cultural Festival in Jingtian Village, Shangjiangwei Town,, which was a Nüshu festival activity that gathered the performance of rural indigenous residents. In the same year, the county government also held large-scale cultural activities such as Jiangyong Nüshu Cultural Tourism Festival and Grapefruit Festival and International Nüshu Calligraphy and Painting Art Exhibition. These activities not only contacted local community residents to watch and participate, but also invited artists, calligraphers, performers and tourists outside Jiangyong to further expand the influence of local culture.

1.4 The Stages of Nüshu Studies

This subchapter first analyses the three historical stages of Nüshu research, including studies on Nüshu scripts and history, studies on Nüshu's gendered narratives and its literary features and Nüshu as heritage protection and development. This analysis illustrates the transformation of Nüshu research from linguistics and literature to sociology and heritage studies over the past 30 years. Some research gaps can be found through this analysis.

1.4.1 Nüshu Scripts and History

Nüshu became an academic focus in the 1980s nationwide and worldwide. Searching for publications with key word 'Nüshu' in China's largest literature searching website 'CNKI.NET', a total of 859 results can be retrieved (see Figure 5). The figure below shows the overall trends of Nüshu-themed publications in Chinese since 1988. It can be seen that the number of Nüshu-themed publications increased significantly after 2000.
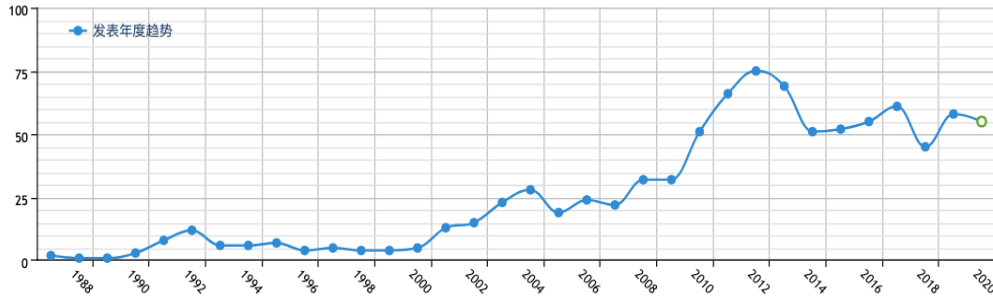
Figure 5. The Overall Trend of Nüshu Academic Literature from 1987–2020 (data from CNKI.net via https://kns.cnki.net/kns/Visualisation/VisualCenter.aspx).

When Nüshu was unearthed by scholars in the 1980s (Gong, 1983; Gong and Zhao, 1986), there were only a few natural Nüshu transmitters, such as Gao Yinxian, Yi Nianhua and Tang Baozhen, while young women were not interested in these scripts and unwilling to learn them. Only a few pieces of original remains have been handed down to contemporary individuals. Nüshu culture was in great danger of dying out in the 1980s, hence, scholars at that time collected and preserved original Nüshu materials as much as they could. They assembled Nüshu objects from the last few 'Natural Transmitters (自然传人) (Tang, 2016)'[13], translated the collected works into Chinese and studied them from various perspectives. Nüshu publications during this period mainly focused on the society, customs and history of the Nüshu transmission areas (see Chiang, 1995; Zhao, 1995), and the phonetic transcription and explanation of Nüshu scripts (see Chen, 2006; Chiang, 1995).

The aim of the linguists and anthropologists from the 1980s to the 1990s was to collect the remaining Nüshu texts and to sort and annotate the scripts. In addition, historical issues such as the origin of Nüshu were also of concern. Gong (1995) in his book

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[13] 'Natural Transmitter' means these women remained the traditional form of inheritance in history; their Nüshu knowledge was delivered by their female predecessors. Tang (2016) recorded the life of 'the last natural Nüshu transmitter', in which he defined natural transmitter as one who has been immersed in Nüshu culture and has used Nüshu in communication in daily life.

Female Scripts and Women's Society introduces in detail the social customs, historical environment and the specific process of Nüshu's discovery. Gong's other work '*Nu shu tong (*女书通*)*' (2007) is a reference book of Nüshu. He determined a number of Nüshu standard scripts by comparing Nüshu scripts written by different transmitters such as Hu Meiyue, He Yanxin, Yang Huanyi, Gong Zhebing, Zhao liming, Xie Zhiming, Zhou Shuoyi and Tang Gongwei. This book also provides Nüshu's pronunciation in 'pinyin (拼音)', which is the official romanisation system for Standard Chinese in mainland China. The Nüshu scripts included in *Nüshu Phonation Electronic Dictionary* (Xie and Wang, 2002) and *Chinese Nüshu Dictionary* (Xie and Xie, 2009) are from the Nüshu works in the circulation area before 1990. A total of 429 Nüshu works were annotated and classified in Zhao's *China Nüshu Collection* (1992). Another of her *Nüshu Collection* (Zhao, 2005) covers more than 90% of the original Nüshu materials available at that time. Zhao (1998) discusses Nüshu's internal graphological system and its external cultural contexts according to its three prominent features: a variant form of Chinese characters, a phonetic script and a women's script. Chen's *Nüshu-Chinese Dictionary* (Chen, 2006) collates more than 3,400 Nüshu scripts from over 500 original texts and copies of Nüshu. The dictionary creatively shows the evolution process of each Nüshu character from Chinese characters. Another *Nüshu Dictionary* was published by Zhou Shuoyi in 2002, a folk Nüshu scholar. This edition is widely recognised by many Nüshu transmitters and folk Nüshu bearers.

Studies on Nüshu's history usually include two aspects. First is the ethnicity of Nüshu. Gong (1995: 7) presents Nüshu as a kind of Pingdi Yao[14] script in Jiangyong, Hunan Province in ancient times. Zhao points out that (1995: 16) 'the language recorded by

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[14] Pingdi Yao (平地瑶) is an unclassified Sinitic language spoken by the Yao people who mainly live in Hunan Province, China.

Nüshu is not Xiang language[15], Southwest Mandarin[16] or one of Yao languages[17], but a kind of Chinese dialect'. Second is research on the origin and generation of Nüshu. Some scholars believe that Nüshu originated from primitive Chinese characters. Li (1995: 187) believes that Nüshu may originate from prehistoric pottery as it had many similarities with Nüshu. Pan and Liang (2003) suggest Nüshu may be the cultural remains of the matriarchal society because of its distinctive female cultural characteristics. After decades of comprehensive academic research on the ethnographic documents, original objects and inheritance condition of Nüshu, scholars now tend to believe that Nüshu originated in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Gong, 1992a; Zhao, 1995).

1.4.2 Nüshu Literature on Gender and Feminism

Since the 2000s, Nüshu's academic discussions have turned to Nüshu's literary narrative, especially its feminist reflections and thoughts (Lo, 2013; 2012; Liu, 2010a; Lee, 2008). Studies indicate that in antient China, Jiangyong women who were excluded from the official schooling absorbed and transformed a number of Chinese characters and formed a relatively systematic, simple and practical set of female scripts (Zhao, 1995: 37).

Scholars examined how Nüshu manifested women's real-life experience, values and historical environment. Gong (1992b), through in-depth text analysis, exemplifies the state of living of Jiangyong women, such as their growth path, ways of interactions, indigenous festivals and rituals, marriage and lineage relations, as well as their religious beliefs and worship. Liu and Hu (1994) examine Nüshu's folk narrative ballads and stories such as *Zhu Yintai* (祝英台), *Fairy Carp* (鲤鱼精), *Flower Girl* (卖花女), *Lady Wang*

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[15] Xiang (湘语), also known as Hunanese, is a group of linguistically similar and historically related Sinitic languages, spoken mainly in Hunan province.

[16] Southwestern Mandarin (西南官话) is a Mandarin Chinese language spoken in much of central and southwestern China. Southwest Mandarin is about 50% mutually intelligible with Standard Chinese.

[17] Yao languages (瑶语), or the Mienic, are spoken by the Yao people of China.

(王氏女), *Anecdotes of the Third Daughter* (三姑记), *Lady Xiao* (肖氏女), and *Lady Lo* (罗氏女). Their study shows that most of Nüshu's folk ballades and stories set females as the protagonists and usually convey an aspiration for equality between men and women (Liu and Hu, 1994: 311). Nüshu narratives usually have a romantic tone and a contempt for feudalism. In various Nüshu writings, women showed their strength, courage, ability and initiative, while men were often portrayed as timid and incompetent (Idema, 2011: 8). Through this oral communication channel specifically belonging to women, the collective voice of women could be heard (McLaren, 1996: 400–401). McLaren (2013) explores several stories recorded in Nüshu that relate to the memories of past events in the region and Nüshu writings' rare insight into how collective memories help regional communities to construct a sense of group identity and offer a remarkable example of the expressive power of marginalised groups in pre-modern Chinese society. Lo (2013) analyses how Nüshu women expressed their concerns and in turn defined for themselves positive terms in the contexts they lived in. The rhetoric of the writing is interwoven with individual and collective memories, fragmentary and repetitive, recalling a dying culture that once united the women in an exclusive sisterhood, at the same time delivering a genealogy of their being, which was forgotten in history. Liu's study (2003) examines the relationship between gender, class, power, voice, performance and historical narration in Nüshu texts and suggests that in the context of the performance of the text, Nüshu opened up space to construct an alternative identity for married women.

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It contains a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary criticism and so on. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 2010: 223; Hawkesworth, 2006: 25–27; Beasley, 1999: 3–11). The history of the modern Western feminist movement has experienced four 'waves' (Humm, 1995: 251; Walker, 2001: 78–80; Chamberlain, 2017). The first

comprised women's suffrage movements of the 19th and early-20th centuries, promoting women's right to vote. The second wave began in the 1960s, reflected in the women's liberation movement and campaigns for legal and social equality for women. A third wave was identified during the 1990s, characterised by a focus on individuality and diversity. The fourth wave, from around 2012, used social media to combat sexual harassment, violence against women and rape culture. In providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Scholars have long combined the consciousness embodied in Nüshu with feminist consciousness.

Historically, Nüshu's literature and cultural practices have embodied rich feminist connotations. Ji (2004) believes that Nüshu's narrative poetry reveals the call for equality between men and women, subversion of patriarchy and male centralism and reconstruction of women's history, all of which are in line with the core idea of feminism. Cuellar (2006) demonstrates that Nüshu is entirely justified on a political, ideological and economic basis that stresses the fact that women have historically been victims of overt (and covert) discrimination and exploitation in our society. Peng (2008) indicates that group gathering and communication allow the revolution and creation elements to awaken in a local women's collective, providing an internal driving force for the production of Nüshu. Zhong (2009) suggests that Nüshu is the product of women's resistance under patriarchal oppression and the product of development of female consciousness. The emergence of Nüshu marks the beginning of female identity construction among the Nüshu women who tried to build their female identity and collective identity by strengthening female social roles, representing female life and reshaping the female image (Fu, 2010). Broussard (2008), from the perspective of curriculum theory, explores how Nüshu, in what is spoken and what is left silent, forms a curriculum that shapes experiences through which the women learn how to present and understand their identities.

1.4.3 Researching Heritage Nüshu

The third phase of Nüshu research has existed since the 2010s, when the concept of cultural heritage began to prevail in China. Increasingly, academic works turn to address Nüshu and cultural heritage protection and transmission, heritage industry development and heritage governance. Scholars have noticed the aesthetic values of Nüshu in tourism, media, cultural creative industry and heritage tourism. Most of these literatures are in Chinese. Wu and Xiao (2006) draw attention to the building up of Nüshu's heritage tourism brand and a female-themed tourist area in the indigenous region so as to augment the local economy. Fu (2012) investigates Nüshu tourism with a SWOT analysis and puts forward the value of cultural heritage in the local tourism industry. He Xiarong (2011) investigates the inheritance crisis of Nüshu scripts and culture as an ICH in its modernity process from interdisciplinary perspectives of anthropology, sociology, cultural ecology, symbolic economy and feminism. She explores how Nüshu can inherit and protect its heritage while maturing its symbolic capital in contemporary China. He Huaxiang (2010), in her doctoral dissertation, discusses the dissemination of ICH, taking Nüshu as a case study. This study clarifies the characteristics and current problems in China's ICH communication and designs purposeful strategies based on the status of ICH protection in China such as the multiple use of media, heritage communication in universities and the empowerment of the folk society.

In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the significance of social media and new media to Nüshu's ICH communication. Luo's (2013) research highlights the significance of new media in dealing with the geographical restrictions and insufficient funds in heritage transmission and spread. Luo's research emphasises the new media platform of Nüshu established by heritage institutions and experts such as Renren.com, Sina Weibo and QQ in China. Tan's research in 2015 discusses Jiangyong Nüshu's Communication Model Construction in the new media era. Tan (2015) proposes to build a Nüshu users' community with social media so that participants of different

backgrounds can maintain close contact. Tan (2017) explores the spread of Nüshu culture in social media. This study takes Nüshu's the WeChat platform as the research object and examines social media's sustainable impacts on Nüshu's circle communication. However, while Tan (2017) pays special attention to the new media influence of official Nüshu Transmitters, heritage sectors and academic institutions, he ignores the voices of folk Nüshu individuals and groups on the WeChat platform. His research failed to notice the bottom-up heritage practices.

In recent years, critical views considering social-political factors in Nüshu's heritage transformation and construction have been put forward. Scholars have begun to consider how Nüshu as a heritage item is influenced by increasing cultural, economic and political forces. Liu (2014) reveals women's views and life situations by studying traditional Nüshu literature. She uncovers the unseen cultural-political strengths behind academic research, especially the 'shaping power' of publication, which not only preserves cultural heritage, but also restrains the writing space of Nüshu inheritors. Liu (2017) traces the trajectory of Nüshu's development as a heritage project in changing rural China, in particular its evolving function and social meanings.

The above analysis presents three stages of Nüshu research, including studies on Nüshu's scripts and history, literature and gender, as well as studying Nüshu as cultural heritage. Currently, with the progression of heritage globalisation and nationalisation in China, the perspective of Nüshu research has been dramatically expanded. However, research gaps can still be found in these studies. Few studies have considered the sociological implications of Nüshu's cultural-political changes in the past three decades, and there is a lack of literature on Nüshu's transformation from a critical social perspective. An examination considering Nüshu as a process of heritage 'making' from the scope of critical heritage studies, heritage discourse and identity as a new research dimension is worth deepening in this study. It is also significant to capture the voices of folk heritage participants via social media channels in the digital era to understand their specific practices and perceptions on heritage. Taking a critical and sociological

perspective into consideration, the academia of heritage studies will be enriched with research on Nüshu as a hierarchical heritage community, Nüshu's authenticity debates and heritage monopoly and Nüshu as a case of heritage democratisation. With these intentions in mind, the next section presents the scope of this study.

1.5 The Scope of this Research

1.5.1 Aims and Objectives

There have been various heritage studies from the critical perspective. Despite this strategic direction, the Eurocentrism aspect of critical heritage analysis (Winter, 2014; 2013) reminds us that the critical heritage studies in non-European regions and countries are worth enriching. Heritage scholars have examined cases discussing Chinese heritage-making and heritage politics (see Zhu and Maags, 2020; Maags and Svensson, 2018; Blumenfield, 2018; Cui, 2018; Liu, T, 2013; Blumenfield and Silverman, 2013; Zhu and Li, 2013; Sigley, 2010). Several heritage sites and projects have been analysed considering governance approaches, policies, heritage tourism, heritage authenticity and so on. Inspired by the existing outstanding research and theories, this study will further enrich critical heritage research in the Chinese context by exploring a Chinese national-level ICH Nüshu. This study will provide a critical, sociological perspective to understand heritage Nüshu in contemporary China. The research aim is not to investigate Nüshu from the traditional perspective as female scripts or customs, but emphasise the examination of the heritage identity-making and heritage discourses as the heritagisation process of Chinese ICH Nüshu (a theoretical framework considering identity, discourse and heritage is framed in the next chapter). This study will demonstrate that the contemporary transformation of this heritage is now largely affected by the power games among the stakeholders in the heritage community.

Based on the background of Chinese cultural heritage under globalisation and nationalisation, this study aims to scrutinise the interactions among various heritage

stakeholders such as officially authenticated Nüshu Transmitters, indigenous Nüshu bearers, heritage custodians and heritage practitioners in order to understand their comprehension of heritage. Specifically, this study explores one main theme, which is to identify and distinguish the accessible heritage discourses that can represent different identities in this community and how these heritage discourses are legitimised by the language use of actors. In this process, this study will examine the construction and operation of the hierarchical nature of the Nüshu community. In this study, heritage discourses are studied from two aspects. The first aspect targets the operation of the official heritage discourse of the heritage authorities from national to local levels. The second aspect focuses on the folk heritage discourse formed by the indigenous heritage bearers. This aspect of the analysis demonstrates how folk heritage discourse promotes heritage democratisation in the Nüshu community. The research questions of this study can be clarified as follows.

1.5.2 Research Questions

Research Question 1: What heritage discourses can represent the identity-making of participants in this heritage community?

Research Question 2: How do different discourses and identities obtain their 'legitimacy' in heritage through the use of language? In order to clarify this question, two further questions are presented:

2.1: In the Nüshu field, how do the disputes surrounding heritage authentication and authenticity manifest in the heritage discourse as governed by the state power?

2.2: In the Nüshu field, how is folk heritage discourse corroborated, and how can folk and indigenous participants construct, claim and assemble their heritage identity and regain their status in heritage through the use of digital technology and new media?

1.5.3 Research Significance

This research makes theoretical, methodological and policy recommendations in terms of cultural heritage studies in the Chinese context. In terms of theoretical contribution, this study enriches study fields including Nüshu studies, heritage studies, sociology, Chinese cultural studies and social media studies. This research develops a 'discursive method for heritage research' (Wu and Hou, 2015), comprehending heritage with Foucault's arguments' around discourse, power and knowledge (Foucault, 2010; 1991; 1979; 1978) and a constructive identity-making angle (Block, 2007; Tilly, 2002; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Cerulo, 1997; Hall, 1992; Anderson, 1991).

Using innovative theoretical framing, this study links identity, discourse and heritage to investigate cultural heritage (see Chapter Two). This framework is implemented with a CDA analytical perspective to critically explore the intangible cultural heritage of Nüshu in the contemporary Chinese political and social-cultural context. Under the framework, this study critically demonstrates the practices, characteristics, situations and challenges of the official Chinese heritage discourse and folk heritage discourse. It also investigates the identity-making, identity disputes, as well as identity authentication of the official and folk Nüshu heritage participants. This study develops a case of making AHD in contemporary China (Wu, 2012; Wu and Song, 2012; Zhang and Wu, 2016; Svensson and Maags, 2018; Su, Song and Sigley, 2019), relevant theories regarding the authenticity of ICH (Chhabra, 2019; Su, 2018; Deacon and Smeets, 2013; Paddock and Schofield, 2017; Hu, Feng and Zhang, 2015; Lixinski, 2014). This study provides a critical heritage study of ICH in the Chinese context, considering and replenishing identity, discourse theories, as well as CHS and CDA theories. This study demonstrates that there are two explicit heritage discourses in the Chinese ICH Nüshu community, namely the official heritage discourse and the folk heritage discourse. This study argues that there is an official heritage discourse in China and in the ICH Nüshu community with hierarchical, authoritative political-economic oriented features. On the other hand, this study investigates another essential heritage

discourse, namely the folk heritage discourse in the ICH Nüshu community, with its digital, open and democratic features.

In terms of methodology, this research combines critical heritage studies (CHS), digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA) and demonstrates the rationality of the combination. It develops qualitative research methods in CHS, absorbs and progresses preceding research of digital ethnographers (such as Bluteau, 2019; Caliandro, 2018; Pink et al., 2015; Boyd, 2015; Postill and Pink, 2012; Kelty, 2008; Wilson, 2006; Muñiz and Schau, 2005; Gatson and Zweerink, 2004; Leander and McKim, 2003). It provides a case study that will demonstrate the implementation of critically studying contemporary Chinese cultural heritage through Chinese social media platforms. This study summarises the advantages, disadvantages, precautions, steps and social significance of applying digital ethnography on social media platforms to carry out Chinese critical heritage research. These findings can provide empirical references for future heritage research, digital ethnography research and social media research. In terms of the combination of methodology and theoretical framework, the implementation of this research illustrates the applicability of critical discourse analysis to critical heritage studies that consider identity, discourse and heritage. This also provides methodological contributions for future related research.

In terms of cultural and social significance, this research, from the perspective of critical heritage research and critical discourse analysis, enables the once invisible, indigenous, local and grassroots heritage participants to be seen and heard. For Nüshu studies, heritage studies and the broader cultural anthropology, this research deepens the expressions of heritage practices, heritage understanding, heritage inheritance and heritage development from Chinese, folk, indigenous heritage communities. The data and opinions presented in this dissertation can be linked to future related research, which is conducive to the cross-regional, cross-border and cross-disciplinary comparative research in the field of critical heritage. Finally, this research also contributes policy significance. Based on the analysis and reflection of the current

global and Chinese heritage governance framework as well as the problems and challenges discovered in the Chinese ICH community in this case, this research finally puts forward countermeasures and suggestions for heritage policies and future heritage governance practices.

Chapter Two：Theoretical Framework: Heritage, Identity and Discourse

This study examines the heritage discourses and identity negotiations and conflicts in the Nüshu community to demonstrate the power-related interactions among the stakeholders and heritage institutions in the practices of the protection, inheritance and development of China's intangible cultural heritage. To demonstrate this, a guiding framework needs to be developed for researching the heritage-making of Nüshu, as well as the heritage identities and discourse in the community.

To be more specific, this research considers the philosophical dimensions of post-structuralism and critical realism, drawing on works by scholars such as Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough, Laurajane Smith, etc. This research, from a critical perspective, focuses on how the identity and discourse construction of actors in contemporary heritage communities reflects power competition, and how dominant and marginalised groups are generated through the forming and strengthening of different heritage discourses. This chapter constructs an applicable theoretical framework, combining a series of concepts, especially identity, discourse and heritage. The identity theory from the perspective of social constructionism and Foucault's theory of discourse, power and knowledge are of great significance to the theoretical framework of this research.

The second part of this chapter further focuses on the areas of AHD and CHS, to which potential theoretical contributions are likely to be made in this research. The status quo of AHD research and the theoretical development of CHS in China are demonstrated, explicating the CDA analytical perspective of this study. The third part of this chapter focuses on the literature on heritage authenticity and authentication. It specifically discusses the notion of heritage authenticity from four theoretical dimensions and the notion of Hot/Cool Authentication in heritage, as well as the relevance of these notions to heritage identity-making and discourse construction. It is on the basis of these

concepts that this research is able to elaborate the formation of hot/cool authentication of heritage in the Chinese context.

In short, the theoretical framework and the discussions surrounding identity, discourse and heritage in this chapter are significant to the whole thesis as the rational and analytic elements to get the picture of the heritagisation process of Nüshu. By looking at Nüshu participants' insights into their identity, heritage discourse and heritage practices, this study can illustrate the tactics, challenges and dilemmas of this heritage community. The potential contribution of this chapter lies in that, under the enlightenment of the research perspectives of the scholars from various fields, it establishes a framework in order to demonstrate a unique Chinese heritage case study and conceptualise features of Chinese heritage discourses and Chinese heritagisation.

2.1 Heritage and Identity

This section focuses on the concepts of identity and discourse and their application in heritage research. This research emphasises the social and constructive nature of identity, emphasising that identity is fluid, constructive and constantly changing (Hall, 1992). In heritage research, an important assumption is that heritage is related to identity (Smith, 2017; Xue et al., 2017; Goulding and Domic, 2009; Stronza, 2008; Rogers, 2002). By discussing the identity formulation process of participants in the field of Nüshu heritage, this research makes theoretical contributions combining heritage and identity theories.

2.1.1 Identity and Identity-making

Fearon (1999: 36) argues that in academic writing, 'identity' usually refers to either a social category, identified by membership procedures and supposedly characteristic qualities or anticipated behaviours, or a socially distinguishing facet that one takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential. However, the notion of identity has different interpretations in different research paradigms and traditions. Scholars from various fields have put forward specific understandings of

this concept. Fearon (1999: 2) believes that identity currently has two connected meanings: social and personal.

In the sense of Personal Identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic(s) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable (Fearon, 1999: 2); it reflects people's concepts and relatively stable self-understandings of who they are, and how they are related to others (Ige, 2010; Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1992; Taylor, 1989; Abrams and Hogg, 1988). Identities are used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are usually defined by others 'on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture' (Deng, 1995: 1). McAdams suggests (1988) identity is sometimes considered a synonym for ideology, and ideology may even generate identity.

On the other hand, in the sense of Social Identity, sociologists often use the term identity to describe social identity, or the collection of group memberships that define the individual. Identity in this sense refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities (Jenkins, 1996: 4). Wendt (1994: 395) explains that social identities are sets of meanings that a participant attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. Social identities are at once cognitive schemas that enable a participant to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations. In this sense, 'socially constructed' means that social categories vary over time, historically, and are the products of human thinking, discourse and action (Fearon, 1999: 26). Wu (2011) suggests that identity is inseparable from the social environment in which it is produced.

Identity in essentialism suggests that people have a stable, longstanding, essential and unified self-identity (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998; Sayer, 1997). The time-honoured studies on identity often begin with conceiving the 'self' as something determined, independent and self-disciplined. However, identity in constructivism is in opposition

to that in essentialism (Sayer, 1997). Criticisms of identity in essentialism regarding racism, feminism, gender and sexual orientation, as well as criticisms of cultural essentialism come to mind (Schor and Weed, 2004; Assiter, 1996; Williams and Chrisman, 1993; Nussbaum, 1992) when people fix and homogenise a particular group's identity by suppressing differences (Sayer, 1997; DeLamater and Hyde, 1998). Constructivists argue that individuals can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interactions with other actors. Identity is about the constant and ongoing engagement of individuals in interactions with others (Block, 2007). It is a kind of 'becoming'; it is social, a learning process, a nexus and a local-global interplay (Wenger, 1998: 163).

Constructivists believe that identity is flowing, constructed and continually shifting (Jacoby and Ochs, 1995; Hall, 1992). It appreciates differences, hybridisation, migration and displacement. This perspective declines to set the fundamental and essential characteristics of any category as the unique nature of the collective members. From the constructivist perspective, 'having a unified, complete, and coherent identity is an illusion' (Hall, 1992: 277). On the contrary, with the progress in the modern meaning system and ways of cultural representation, people are faced with dazzling, rapidly changing identities (ibid: 277). An individual or a group is a social artefact, an entity that is shaped, remanufactured and mobilised according to the discourse of the dominant culture and power centre (Cerulo, 1997: 387). Anderson (1991) also regards constructivist identity as a social-cognitive composition. Identity is inclusive in space and time and is reinforced and moulded by a wide range of social dynamisms (Tilly, 2002; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

In the latest research, the term 'identity-making' has been cultivated by social scholars. Orsatti and Riemer (2015) conceptualise 'identity-making' in their study from a comprehensive engagement with related works in philosophy, organisation studies and adjacent fields from a non-essentialist angle. They believe that identity is actively created. Identity captures the ways in which people actively live their lives in various

contexts and how people are shaped by social practices, individuals and other actions in the world. Identity in this vision is a multiple, social and constant becoming and an active achievement formed through what this study has termed 'identity-making'. Briefly, Orsatti and Riemer's study develops a comprehensive framework that incorporates reflective, narrative and active modes of identity formation, termed 'identity-making'. Hutchinson (2019) further presents that identity-making is a narrative term used to understand the dynamic, relational and ongoing process of making meaning about people, things, contexts and identity through experience. Identity-making, understood narratively as the composition of stories to live by, allows us to imagine diverse communities, contexts and experiences that uniquely shape the stories that people live and narrate.

Lately, there are different categories of research involving identity-making in academic fields. For example, research on students' identity-making in the context of education. Peterman (2017) investigates identity-making at the intersection of teacher and subject matter expertise. Miller (2017), using a framework of identity-making that accounts for students' reflections, narrations and actions, details their experiences exploring queer/disability identities through social networking sites, smartphone applications and blogs. Scholars have also considered identity-making and gender studies (De Graeve, 2019; Sarıoğlu, 2016). De Graeve (2019) investigates straight men's sexual and moral identity-making in non-monogamous dating. Sarıoğlu's research (2016) examines the making of gendered subjectivities on the service floor and highlights alternative strategies of identity construction at work.

There have been studies discussing identity-making with bordering and racial issues (Kanobana and De Graeve, 2020; Jenkins, 2019; Haidarali, 2018; Huynh and Jung Park, 2018; Makarychev, 2018). Kanobana and De Graeve (2020) reveals black identity-making by investigating discourses and cultural practices among transracial adoptive families and black native speakers. Jenkins' research (2019) provides an empirical case that underlines how identity categories constructed as stable by sociocultural theorists

are often internally contested within the communities that occupy them. Makarychev (2018) explores various geopolitical contexts in which a refugee crisis affected the debate on borders and identity making. Huynh and Jung Park's research (2018) links people's identity-making and place, exploring the process of self-making among different groups and the influences of mobilities on political and socio-cultural inclusion (and exclusion).

Further, in recent years, more and more studies have focused on identity-making by means of social media and digital technology (Mahmod, 2019; Villa-Nicholas, 2019; Atkinson, 2018). Mahmod (2019) studies the triangular relationship between nation group, transnationalism and digital communication through online activities. Mahmod (2019) highlights how traditional spheres of identity such as ethnicity, culture, gender and religion, which have hitherto provided people with firm identities, are being contested in an age of digital technologies and new global collaborations. Villa-Nicholas (2019), by looking at popular visual-based social media accounts, explores how identity is constructed and adapted in real time through social media platforms. Atkinson (2018) sheds light on the role of the media in shaping young people's cultures, practices and related identity-making by observing multiple media platforms.

By exploring in-depth the notion of identity and identity-making, this study finds that studies on identity-making in different fields have related to a variety of social aspects and theoretical foundations. The term identity-making, from the perspective of social construction, demonstrates a dynamic meaning-making process. This term is likely to be adopted in this research to investigate the meaning-making process of the stakeholders of a heritage community. To be more specific, the distinctiveness of this research is that it sets up identity-making theories, as one of the key concepts, to develop critical heritage research on Nüshu in a Chinese social-cultural environment. Through analysing the identity-making of the participants as a socially constructed process in a heritage community, the heritage transformation in contemporary China can be studied. Nevertheless, questions arise when considering identity and heritage at

the same time. After knowing the notion of identity and identity-making, this chapter asks how is identity and/or identity-making matter in heritage? The next section addresses this question.

2.1.2 Identity in Heritage

Identity became one of the core subjects to anthropologists with the emergence of modern concerns in ethnicity and social movements in the 1970s. This was reinforced by an appreciation, following the trend in sociological thought, of the manner in which the individual is affected by and contributes to the overall social context.

In heritage research, an important assumption is that heritage is related to identity (Smith, 2017; Xue et. al, 2017; Gouldner and Domic, 2009; Stronza, 2008; Rogers, 2002). Di Pietro et. al (2018) believe that culture and cultural heritage are the basis for creating and maintaining identity, sense of belonging and citizenship. Whether it is tangible or intangible, heritage is considered to be the assertion and enhancement of social, cultural, national or ethnic identity (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) clarifies the relationship between heritage, identity and power. She points out that 'heritage is a process intimately tied up with the legitimation of identity, belonging and sense of place' (2017: 25). Through this negotiation process, the meaning of heritage is constantly being shaped and reshaped to meet the needs of the current society. The relationship between heritage and identity is embodied between individuals, communities and countries to shape the cultural wisdom of different groups (Smith, 2017; Timothy and Ron, 2013). To explore the relationship between heritage and identity from a socio-political perspective, Smith (2017) borrows the concept of 'politics of recognition' to consider how identity plays a role in heritage-making. Young (2000: 107) believes that the function of identity politics is to 'cultivate mutual identification among those similarly situated'. Nowadays, more and more national heritage agencies are trying to manipulate heritage-related identity claims for heritage governance and regulation (Smith, 2017), making heritage a process of pursuing identity recognition (ibid). The

negotiation on the recognition of heritage identity is closely related to social-political inclusion and other equality claims (Young, 2000), involving recognition or rejection from different social and cultural groups as well as policymakers. This process ultimately positioned the social and cultural identities of different heritage participants (Smith, 2017). At this level, heritage has become a political and power resource, and can legitimate or illegitimate certain cultural or material capitals (Smith, 2017; Graham and Howard, 2008).

Many studies have evidenced that cultural heritage, whether it is tangible or intangible, is related to the identity construction and identity discourse of heritage participants and heritage communities. Zukin (2012) shows how feelings of identity and belonging are formed around a re-imagined urban village and suggests that heritage preserves traditional patterns of individual ownership and an unusual longevity of stores. Silverman (2005) examines the north coast of Peru and interrogates the conjunction of archaeological discovery, narrational packaging of the past for tourism and discourses of identity. Liu and Fu (2019) show that religious leisure is not only a way to experience and keep one's heritage, but also plays an essential role in identity formation, which occurs in three stages: identity development, identity maintenance and identity moderation/reconstruction.

Scholars have illustrated that heritage identity is closely related to national identity. Maags (2018) investigates how China's development in policy and administration have provided opportunities for the county level to foster cultural identity and national recognition. Laukkanen (2018) addresses religious as well as ethnic identity and heritage in a Tibetan village in China. The research demonstrates that authenticity is in connection with identity in heritage and shows how the villagers of Xidang are affected by several different processes that have affected the sense of authenticity of their identity. Sigley (2013) suggests heritage is a product of the present in the sense of the associated governmental, cultural and identity signifiers; heritage strikes a chord with a renewed regional identity; and heritage is a form of cultural branding, a marker of

regional identity. Pendlebury (2015: 437) also argues that heritage is an important national symbol that diffuses ideas of the nation, national identities and collective identity, thereby fostering not only social inclusion but also economic regeneration and localism. Henderson (2001) investigates the heritage tourism of Hong Kong and provides an insight into the dynamics of the relationship between identity, heritage and tourism that are especially complex within the context of decolonisation.

Further, scholars suggest that heritage identity has been a kind of identity politics, which is largely controlled by the authority. As hegemonic Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006) is likely to constitute what people know about good, beauty and appropriateness, this value system becomes a formidable 'tool of governance' in constructing 'identity, experiences, and social standings' (Smith, 2006: 52). Svensson and Maags (2018: 21) suggest that heritage is a discourse that can be used as a resource for identity politics, social mobilisation and resistance. Maags' study (2018) demonstrates how local non-state stakeholders are not passive but active participants in competing for heritage status, seeking to obtain a 'piece of the pie', as well as potentially influencing local identity construction and locality branding efforts. Maags (2018) argues that by participating in ICH policy implementation, governmental ICH programmes or heritage discourses, local stakeholders are actively striving to obtain a voice in local identity formation and heritage-making. Chan (2018) finds the struggle for heritage recognition within the larger framework of Hong Kong identity politics and pro-China politics. Goulding and Domic (2009) use Croatia in the former Yugoslavia as a case for analysing the implications of manipulating history. It reveals issues in identity and otherness, power and control in heritage communities.

In addition, questions on the authenticity of heritage identity have been increasingly reflected. Alivizatou (2012) argues that the underlying notion of cultural authenticity constitutes 'original' and 'pure' manifestations of cultural identity, implying that certain expressions are considered to be endangered and therefore in need of institutional protection. This study regards heritage as a symbol of identity and connection with the

past and regards the rise of heritage as a vehicle of identity formation. Timothy and Ron (2013) expand the knowledge about the relationships between tourism and food heritage by relating destination images, identity, authenticity and change.

In recent years, the role of social media in shaping heritage identity has been discovered. Shaw and Krug (2013) investigated an online Canadian museum of heritage and immigration, identifying how such a space helps young people to learn about heritage, ethnicity and cultural identity, and, ideally, aid in the development of a positive ethnic identity. Their study especially draws on the use of virtual spaces for identity formation. Svensson (2018) links place, identity and heritage in a mobile society as a sense of belonging to heritage participants. Social media can activate and sustain feelings of belonging and place identity, and thereby produce a sense of affective community. It may furthermore stimulate reflexivity and visual awareness regarding heritage and place. It is believed that that the heritagisation process has prompted people to rediscover their heritage and place-based identity (Svensson, 2018).

A research gap can be found in that there is very little work that takes as its central task an analysis of the linkages between expressions of identity and heritage (Smith, 2017). To enrich the analysis linking heritage and identity as well as identity-making, this study uses identity as an entry point concept to critically investigate the social-cultural issues in the unique, female-themed Nüshu heritage community. Issues to be discussed surrounding identity in this study include the identity transformation of Nüshu heritage participants, heritage identity struggles and crisis, as well as heritage identity authentication of bearers through official or non-official channels. In this analysis, various social, cultural and political factors in contemporary China are paid close attention. Identity-making in this study approaches as a process that involves reflective, narrative and active modes of identity construction. Another distinctive feature is that this research combines identity(making) theories with Foucault's philosophies on discourse and power, shoring up the sociological facet of this study. This dimension is illustrated in the next section.

2.2 Heritage and Discourse

Heritage is increasingly regarded as an issue related to discourse and discourse practice. This section draws on the concept of 'authorised heritage discourse' combining Foucault's concepts of discourse, knowledge and power. Foucault's postmodern perspective emphasises that discourse determines how people view society, culture and identity. Discourse constructs meaning and meaningful social practice. Such a philosophical perspective can be used as the basis to understand the construction of actual social order in a specific society of heritage by observing the interaction of discourse and power. By observing the language use of actors in heritage, one can discover how heritage participants construct their social and cultural identities and how they make their heritage practices meaningful.

2.2.1 Discourse: A Foucauldian Perspective

Foucault's work demonstrates the linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences in the second half of the 20th century (Olsson, 2010). A series of linguistic terminologies were adopted and developed by Foucault. Discourse, power and knowledge are essential subjects of Foucault's discussion. Dialogues about these concepts have been systematically elucidated in his works, such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and *The History of Sexuality* (1979). The theories and concepts developed in them have been broadly employed to explicate a wide range of social-cultural fields and formed one of the most prominent theoretical schools in French post-structuralism. This section gives insights into Foucault's concepts of discourse, power and knowledge, links these discursive-related concepts with identity-making and illustrates how these concepts are related to heritage studies.

The term 'discourse' refers to an extraordinarily diverse field of research with regard to the analysis of language, signs and text (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). Foucault's own definition of discourse is 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourse is regarded as a complex network

of relationships between individuals, texts, ideas and institutions (Olsson, 2010). Discourse practice is a universal activity of mankind that is usually 'embodied in technical processes, institutions, patterns for general behaviour, forms for transmission and diffusion, and pedagogical forms which impose and maintain them' (Foucault, 1977b: 200). Foucault's discourse does not superficially indicate dialogues between individuals but considers a broader social perspective, such as the specific social and historical context in which any discourse occurs (Rabinow, 1984: 4). Discourse is a set of rules of language use established and developed by a specific community in a specific historical period under a specific social environment.

Foucault elucidated the relationship between discourse and power. He suggested that 'discourse spreads and generates power; discourse can enhance, destroy, and expose power; however, discourse also can make power fragile and may even defeat power' (Foucault, 1979: 101). Discourse is the surface manifestation of the underlying will to power, which cannot be reduced to human intentionality (Foucault 1977b: 37–38). It is worth noting that Foucault was critical of theories that consider power as 'sovereign'—a unitary and centralised construct (Foucault, 1980: 115; Wickham, 1986: 169). Foucault suggests 'Power is everywhere; it comes from everywhere . . . power comes from below' (Foucault, 1979, 93–94). 'Power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen' (Foucault, 1980: 154). 'Power is exercised from innumerable points' (Foucault, 1979: 94). In other words, power is reflected in various social practices. Power is not simply related to specific power institutions but is multidimensional; it is employed at all levels of society. The generation of power is related to practices, techniques and procedures.

Foucault further examined the concept of 'knowledge', in which 'power and knowledge directly imply one another' (Foucault 1977a: 27). In this sense, power practice gives rise to new knowledge objects and accumulates new information. In turn, knowledge can maintain the influence of power (Foucault, 1980: 52). Given this, power sets up a particular regime of truth in which certain knowledges become admissible or

possible (Armstrong, 1983: 10). Foucault suggests 'each society has its "Regime of Truth" . . . the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault, in Fontana & Pasquino, 1991: 72–73). In general, Foucauldian discourse is a playing field of power and knowledge/truth (Richardson, 1996).

Foucault's studies of discourse, knowledge and power mainly concentrate on three levels. The first is the 'level of knowledge', which means the rules that govern discursive practices that exert what is true or false. Second is 'the level of power' by which one governs the conduct of others. Third is 'the level of ethics', through which an individual constitutes itself as a subject (Foucault, 2010: 3). From these three levels, an individual's meaning construction is connected with the network of existing power/knowledge discourse, which depends on the individual's understanding of the discourse rules of a specific environment (Olsson, 2010). Discursive rules reflect 'the limits and forms of expressibility, conservation, memory and reactivation (Foucault, 1978: 14–15). Participants in a discourse community may produce a set of 'discursive rules'. Here, a discourse community means people who, at least in the context of a particular role, share a recognised body of 'truth statements' (Racevskis, 1983). Participants of a specific discourse community who interact with each other bear the foundation of their established discursive rules, in which their discourse is legitimated as valid or true (Foucault, 1972). In other words, participants of a specific discourse community use their own discourse rules to evaluate or verify the truth of some of their statements, through which their identities of subjectivity can be constructed. Foucault argued that subjectivity is a process, rather than a state of being (Taylor. D, 2011). Discourse contains institutionalised patterns of knowledge that govern the formation of subjectivity of an individual (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). The sense of identity of the 'self' is constituted or created in activities and the formation of the

identity is to a large extent constituted by power (McGushin, 2011). 'A single text may have hundreds of different identities for different discourse communities, each of them legitimate in the context of their own point in space and time' (Olsson, 2010: 66). This reflects that identity is itself achieved through discourse as the product of power/knowledge.

Discourse and power/knowledge are closely related to the notion of identity-making. The postmodern 'linguistic turn' has made the 'self' come to be a construction of language use. Self-identity is produced, negotiated and reshaped through discursive practices (Rose, 1998). It is socially organised, reorganised, constructed, co-constructed and continually reconstructed through language and discourse (Kouhpaeenejad and Gholaminejad, 2014; Pablé, Haas and Christe, 2010). Identities are not considered to be simply symbolised in discourse, but rather performed, carried out and manifested through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamber, 2006).

Foucault's discourse theories facilitate the breadth and depth of this research. In this research, heritage discourse, power/knowledge and identity are organically linked. To be more specific, discourse determines how people perceive society, culture and their identity. Discourse constructs meaning and meaningful social practices; it determines what people want to see and what they can see. As a network of power relations, discourse constitutes, expresses and spreads power. Social and political power is usually fulfilled through discursive practices. The construction of the actual social order in a specific society can be distinguished by examining the interactions between discourse and power. It is worth mentioning that the concept of power in the Foucauldian world is certainly not intrinsically negative. Power is never the property of any specific individual, state or institution, but exists in all kinds of social practices. Power and knowledge interact with each other. Power creates knowledge, while knowledge continues and strengthens the social effects of power. Knowledge, through discourse practices in a particular society, can be employed to manage the behaviours

of the participants. In the interactions between power and knowledge, regimes of truth are established within different discourse communities, in which their specific discourse rules play a role. This is essentially a process of forming and claiming legitimacy, through which the members' identities in these discourse communities can be further empowered.

The above analysis reveals that discourse and power are the keys for community participants to achieve their identity-making. The concept of discourse has been noticed by many heritage scholars and has been developed in heritage studies. The next section focuses on the discursive-related concepts and theories of Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006) and how this dimension is applied in this research.

2.2.2 Discourse in Heritage and Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)

Heritage is increasingly recognised as an issue related to discourse and discursive practices. Hall (2005) points out that heritage should be regarded as a discourse practice, which is one of the ways that a nation can gradually build a collective memory for itself. This, for the nation, means the strengthening of political legitimacy and civil education (Wu and Hou, 2015). Exploring the production and reproduction of heritage via discourse helps to critically understand what heritage is, the contemporary meaning of heritage, and how heritage is shaped, reshaped and used in different local environments, historical periods and cultural traditions (Wu and Hou, 2015). From a discursive perspective, heritage is socially constructed. There has been a discursive turn in heritage studies (Harrison, 2013) since cultural heritage creates a discursive space where social changes are discussed, with a particular language for discussion (Hafstein, 2012).

Smith (2004) uses traditions as discourse or discursive structures to widen heritage theories. Under the influence of Foucault's theories and methods, her research explores how power and knowledge produce 'governmentality' through traditions as a carrier. Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) is presented by Smith (2006) in her book *Uses*

of Heritage. AHD analyses discourse negotiations and power relations within a heritage community. Smith (2006) suggests that AHD establishes and sanctions a top-down relationship between experts, heritage sites and visitors, in which experts 'translate' (Bauman, 1987) this discourse into national policies and laws. AHD turns heritage visitors to passive consumers (Smith, 2006). It constitutes and legitimises what heritage is and who has the ability to speak for the nature and meaning of heritage (ibid). Furthermore, AHD works to exclude the historical, cultural and social experiences of a range of groups such as ethnic groups (Leone et al., 1995; Hayden, 1997; Shackel, 2001) and indigenous communities (Langford, 1983; Fourmile, 1989; Deloria, 1992; Ah Kit, 1995; Watkins, 2003) and attempts to constrain and limit their critiques (Smith, 2006). AHD could reach the legitimacy of specific identities, values and ideologies by self-referencing and granting privilege to its spokespersons. It is a useful apparatus to apprehend how global heritage values foster and form polices, laws and practices. AHD is derived from the international heritage regime and embodied in universal conventions, policies and laws.

Several studies have demonstrated the significance of AHD in investigating heritages. Cooper (2013) scrutinises the competition and development of Authorised Heritage Discourses in a 're-emergent' Scottish nation by exploring the form and nature of heritage legislation and how competing discourses between the 'official' heritage and others are operationalised and experienced. Parkinson and Redmond (2016) explore the competing values and priorities embedded within lay discourses of heritage through observing a range of heritage participants in three small towns in Ireland. His study demonstrates how non-experts construct their understanding of the build of heritage. Beardslee (2016) discusses how the ICH model contains promises of community empowerment and ways in which the issues of power inherent in the ICH paradigm have real consequences for heritage practitioners. Taylor and Gibson (2017) consider how digitisation reinforces the Authorised Heritage Discourse through investigating

three dimensions of power including conflict resolution, control of expression and shaping of preferences (Lukes, 2005).

Bideau and Yan (2018) analyse three discourses in heritage, namely the official discourse, the preservationist discourse and the local discourse. Their study suggests the governmental discourse relies upon a selective vision of the past that highlights a conventional aesthetic of the old city, the preservationist discourse is more disputed and trenchant and the local discourse is more blurred. Giaccardi (2012) examines the impact of ubiquitous personal memory devices and social media technologies on heritage discourse and practice and highlights the complexities of heritage discourse and practice in the context of the participatory culture shaped by social media. Beardslee (2016) suggests the power to shape heritage discourse often depends on one being literate and possessing the ability to write the correct sort of prose and make inventory descriptions, dossiers, educational pamphlets and applications for funding. Bennett (2009) illustrates how rock music is being culturally and historically repositioned through the application of 'heritage rock discourses'. Zhu (2018a and 2018b) provides an understanding of the contested nature of heritage in the rapidly shifting urban landscape of contemporary China and suggests that there is still space where individuals may challenge the dominant narrative. While such challenges might not replace the existing official discourse, people adapt, negotiate and contest these heritage discourses and practices to pursue their own interests. Valdemar Hafstein uses Foucault's idea of governmentality to make sense of ICH as a technology of governance, one that uses culture as a kinder, gentler means of rendering individuals governable (Hafstein, 2005, 2014).

Several works have incorporated the concept of AHD into their discussion to criticise and contest the dominance of the Eurocentric notions of heritage in the international realm (Wu and Hou, 2015). Chinese heritage scholar Wu (2012) argues that the idea of what constitutes heritage in the government and experts' documentation is very much dominated by Western heritage discourse that tends to deny indigenous values of

heritage by favouring a high culture of 'monuments', 'authenticity', 'immortality', and 'the West'. The implications of Wu's study move heritage research beyond the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), opening up cultural space not only to recognise competing heritage discourses, but also to engage in different ways of making 'heritage'. Wu and Hou (2015) present what can be called 'a discursive approach to heritage studies' and discuss how it may develop in further intellectual endeavours. Heritage is deemed to be discourse and discursive practices that focus on theoretical explorations of the discursive nature of heritage. They demonstrate that cultural discourses of heritage examine alternative efforts in understanding local, historical voices and ways of constructing the past.

However, Svensson and Maags (2018) suggest that the academia has ignored how countries develop their own specific versions of AHD and the mixture of local and global values. Therefore, more attention needs to be devoted to how individual countries develop their own AHD, and how they reflect local conditions, ideologies and aspirations. The next section discusses AHD studies in the Chinese context.

2.3 Studying Chinese Heritage in the Scope of AHD and CHS

In the above chapters, two key concepts, 'identity' and 'discourse', are connected with heritage. The application of these concepts in heritage studies area also elaborated, demonstrating the feasibility of developing theories in this study linking identity, discourse and heritage, especially theories on heritage participants' identity-making from a constructivist view and theories surrounding Authorised Heritage Discourse from a non-Western-centred perspective.

This subchapter will examine the theoretical context linking AHD of this heritage study. It emphasises a critical perspective on conducting heritage studies with Chinese heritage elements. Hence, this subchapter analyses existing heritage studies using AHD in the Chinese context and the notion and development of Critical Heritage Studies

(CHS) in the scholarship. Through the analysis, the philosophical aspect of critical realism is linked with the analytical angle of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

2.3.1 Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) in Chinese Context

Numerous works have considered AHD in the Chinese context. Maags and Svensson (2018) in their edition work specifically analyse AHD in China. They take on a bottom-up perspective that pays closer attention to how individuals and local communities negotiate with, appropriate and, in some instances, challenge the Authorised Heritage Discourse and examine Chinese AHD as a tool of governmentality against the backdrop of local contestations, negotiations and appropriation. Zhang and Lenzer Jr (2020), taking the Hangzhou Section of the Grand Canal as an example, discuss the ideological and institutional factors in the AHD framework and analyse the consequences of the dominant Western values in regulating Chinese heritage practices exemplified by the UNESCO evaluation system. Yan (2015), by investigating the World Heritage 'Fujian Tulou' in China, examines the construction of China's official discourse and compares it with the AHD termed by Smith (2006). Yan finds that China's harmonious official heritage discourse is as hegemonic as the Western AHD, which privileges expert knowledge over local voices. Chan (2018), by investigating the Chaozhou version of the Hungry Ghosts Festival, finds that the 'authorised' national Chinese ICH receives more promotion and attention than others. Wang's study (2012) of the Ancient City of Pingyao indicates that the application of authorised heritage conservation and development at all levels of government has resulted in the displacement of the local population and public services and the elimination of local activities from the traditional living context. Zhang and Wu's study (2016) investigates heritage practices and the tensions that have played out among different voices, meanings and understandings in a Chinese heritage village, arguing that AHD is taken up by the government to weave and frame a narrative of nation-building. Su, Song and Sigley (2019) provide a case to better understand how Western AHD influences local heritage practice in China in regard to the cultural heritage of the Shaolin Temple.

In the Chinese context, AHD comprises a mixture of international and Chinese indigenous concepts and discourse (Nitzky, 2013; Wu, 2012; Yu, 2015; Zhu, 2015). Svensson and Maags (2018) believe that the AHD in the Chinese context has ruptured due to ideological shifts and socio-economic developments. Negotiating, appropriating and resisting the AHD and its implementation provides the possibility for the ordinary citizens, local communities and marginalised groups to express their views (ibid). Briefly, this concept draws on how discourse constitutes and legitimises what heritage is and who has the ability to define the meaning of heritage (ibid). For this research, the implementation of AHD demonstrates the marginalisation and exclusion of a range of communities and the legitimacy and privilege of another range of communities.

While there are several works exemplifying the meaning of AHD in heritage research and many studies focusing on the discussions of AHD in the Chinese context, the uniqueness of this study is that its analysis will specifically focus on the AHD practices within the Nüshu ICH community in China. This study deals with a community of gendered scripts and culture. In this distinct community, heritage discourse, female discourse, official discourse and folk discourse act together. This community has become a Shura field of discourse politics and identity politics in the contemporary Chinese context. The indigenous women who once dominated the gendered heritage community are gradually becoming vassals of heritage politics. The deep-seated social factors causing such transformation are worthy of in-depth discussion. Thus, this research will elaborately demonstrate how the AHD led by Chinese heritage authorities plays a role in China's heritage governance politics and how this AHD is resisted.

To broaden the analysis and make theoretical contributions, this research investigates the operation of two main discourses in the Nüshu community in the analysis: the official heritage discourse and the folk heritage discourse. This study advances the academic thinking on AHD, providing a detailed empirical data-based and community-based analysis of AHD in an ICH field in China. This study demonstrates the finding that the generation and strengthening of the AHD in the Nüshu heritage community in

China is mainly gained from the political instruments of the heritage authorities. AHD in the Chinese context has become a battle for power and resources between local authorities and folk heritage communities. The concept of 'folk heritage discourse' has not been well developed in heritage studies, especially such discourse in China. This study pays close attention to the discourse making by the, to some extent, marginalised and invisible folk heritage participants to illustrate the practices and identity-making in this discourse. In heritage scholarship, the notion of AHD is believed to be related with the notion of CHS, which is discussed in the following section.

2.3.2 Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) in Development

Smith's (2006) thoughts on AHD showed characteristics of critical realism. In her research, *Uses of Heritage* is one of the most influential works in the field of heritage studies in recent years and has influenced a large number of heritage scholars to perceive heritage from a critical perspective. In the early 2010s, the Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS) was set up through a series of dialogues and conferences with scholars from Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Professor Laurajane Smith is the Founding President of the Association. The Association promotes and develops heritage research by introducing and developing CHS. This section accounts for the notion of CHS and shows how this Nüshu study has been carried out in the scope of CHS with critical, sociological perspectives.

ACHS (2012 Manifesto) pinpoints a research gap to heritage researchers in that historical heritage research has always been dominated by Western experts in archaeology, history, architecture and art history. There is still inadequate knowledge about what heritage is and how to study and manage it. The outdated way of looking at heritage privileges old, grand, prestigious, expert-approved sites, buildings and artefacts that sustain Western narratives of nation, class and science. This mode of thinking has caused some dissatisfaction. As such, the rise of CHS insinuates a new way of thinking about and engaging in heritage research.

CHS noticeably advocates 'ruthless criticism of everything existing' (ACHS, 2012 Manifesto). Heritage has always been a political act, and researchers are asked to critically question the issues of heritage being used to maintain power relations. Specifically, CHS encourages the use of broader knowledge, such as knowledge from sociology, anthropology and political science, to provide theoretical insights and techniques for heritage research, and to challenge the established positivism and quantitative analysis practices (ACHS, 2012 Manifesto). CHS encourages the integration of heritage research with memory, public history, community, tourism, planning and development research to enhance interdisciplinary, international networks and dialogues (ACHS, 2012 Manifesto).

Numerous studies have theoretically or conceptually widened the span of CHS. By means of a CHS framework, Baird (2013) examines the socio-political implications and consequences of heritage practices related to indigenous cultural landscapes in post-settler nations. Baird argues that to truly decolonise heritage, scholars must locate and acknowledge how their models, theories and practices of heritage work through systems of power and exclusion. Witcomb and Buckley (2013) engage with the *Manifesto* and argue that heritage studies is in need of a complete renovation. The *Manifesto* points to the importance of the teaching of heritage studies as a potential site for such a practice as well as more collaborative models of research practice. Winter (2013) considers the term critical in the unfolding formulation of CHS. Winter (ibid) suggests there is a need for heritage studies to account for its relationship to today's regional and global transformations by developing post-Western understandings of culture, history and heritage and the socio-political forces that actualise them. Winter (2014) builds on the ongoing development of CHS, arguing it is important for heritage scholars to embark on pluralising how heritage is studied and theoretically framed, in ways that better address the heterogeneous nature of heritage, for both the West and the non-West. Baron (2016) compares CHS with folklore studies. Baron's study suggests that critical heritage scholars involved with ICH can learn from how public folklorists

engage with communities and foster cultural self-determination. Baron (ibid) believes that collaboration and increased dialogue with critical heritage scholars could foster greater awareness of hegemonic discourses, reconceptualisation of the social base of ICH and recognition of the pitfalls of fostering economic development through heritage. Harrison (2018) exemplifies a developing strand of research that focuses on material and ontological approaches to heritage within the emerging interdisciplinary field of CHS. It considers the implications of these approaches for CHS more generally. Gentry and Smith (2019) frame the rationale for the critical turn in heritage studies and discuss how original or radical the concepts and aims of CHS are, and why it has apparently become useful or meaningful to talk about CHS as opposed to simply heritage studies.

Lähdesmäki, Thomas and Zhu (2019) offer a global, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary point of view to the scaled nature of heritage and provide a theoretical discussion on scale as a social construct and a method in CHS. They provide examples and debates from a range of diverse countries, discuss how heritage and scale interact in current processes of heritage meaning-making and explore the heritage-scale relationship as a domain of politics. Increasingly, Chinese cases have involved critical heritage research in the context of the 'heritage boom' and rapid socio-economic changes in China in recent years. The explicit political use of heritage makes it compelling to analyse power relations, governmentality and issues of negotiations and resistance (Svensson and Maags, 2018). Su (2018, 2019), with an ICH element in Lijiang, China as the case, applies a CHS approach to investigate the values and components of ICH. Su's studies investigate people's subjectivities and experiences in the process of ICH value-making, as well as identity-making. Yan (2018) explores three dimensions of the UNESCO World Heritage initiative with particular relevance for China with a sociological lens: the universal agenda, the national practices and the local responses. In the scope of CHS in the Chinese context, Yan offers comprehensive insights into World Heritage, as well as China's deep social, cultural and political structures.

CHS has influenced this study in that it calls for the democratisation of heritage by consciously rejecting elitist cultural narratives and embracing the heritage insights of people, communities and cultures that have traditionally been marginalised in formulating heritage policy and increasing dialogue and debate between researchers, practitioners and communities (ACHS, 2012 Manifesto). CHS calls for the use of a wider range of knowledge resources to investigate the heritage community to see how practices have stimulated the vitality of heritage, especially inviting people and communities that have been marginalised so far to actively participate in the creation and management of heritage. In CHS, heritage is regarded as a social, cultural, economic and political phenomenon. Heritage has become the core of identity politics and conflicts. In this sense, the field of CHS, true to its tradition of focusing in particular on themes of power, protest and dissonance, has become solidly ensconced in academia (Morisset, 2017). In short, CHS prompts this study to revolve around those who are marginalised and excluded and encourages this study to accept different understandings from other societies with an open mind (Winter, 2013; 2014), thus affecting the theorisation of cultural heritage.

The linking of the AHD and CHS concepts motivates the direction and mindset of this research and highlights some research gaps that this research can fill. Chinese critical heritage studies have shown growth in recent years (such as Yan, 2018; Su, 2018; 2019; Lähdesmäki, Thomas and Zhu, 2019; Su, Song and Sigley, 2019; Zhu and Maags, 2020; Zhu, 2020), but its concepts, theories and methods still need to be further supplemented, especially the CHS that combines sociological studies and sociological methods in China. Few studies have paid specific attention to the CHS of Chinese ICH and the practices of AHD in them. It is worth investigating the Chinese ICH Nüshu, a national intangible heritage and a female-themed heritage community with the dimensions of CHS and AHD, in order to enrich the literature for the field of Chinese CHS and AHD. From such a perspective, this study regards Nüshu as a process of social heritage construction and reveals the power relations, discourse and identity negotiations and

challenges in the Nüshu community and how Nüshu is 'made' as an ICH, that is, the 'heritagisation' of Nüshu. The process of heritage-making in CHS is usually conceptualised by scholars with the term 'heritagisation', which is discussed in the next section.

2.3.3 'Heritagisation' in CHS

Heritagisation is a vital concept in CHS and has been adopted and developed by a range of heritage scholars (see Chocano, 2019; Maags, 2019; 2018; Chan, 2018; Zhu, 2018b; Bendix, 2008; Smith 2006; Pendlebury et al., 2004 and so on). Heritagisation as used in the title of this dissertation functions as a key word for its conceptualisation. Harrison (2013: 69) defined heritagisation as 'a process by which objects and places are transformed from functional things into objects of display and exhibition'. In other words, heritagisation is the process through which objects, places and practices are turned into cultural heritage. In the process of heritagisation, meaning and heritage values are socially produced and constructed, rather than intrinsic to material artefacts (Sjöholm, 2016). It is the making of heritage where such claims have been absent in the past (ibid). Scholars used to focus on the heritagisation of space (see Walsh, 2002), or certain sites (such as Hewison, 1987; Smith. M, 2009). Salemink (2016: 316) points out that heritagisation 'constitutes an appropriation of the past and thus an attempt to control the future by certain elites that alienate other groups in the process, as well as an attempt to control the economic value of the commoditised heritage, in the world's biggest economic industry, tourism'. Thus, heritagisation usually embodies the characteristics of elitism. Moreover, heritagisation is likely to be related to these officially-marked cultural heritage items (Salemink, 2016). Sjöholm (2016) develops the concept of heritagisation and links it with the addition of new heritage, reaffirmation of already designated heritage, re-interpretation of already designated heritage and rejection of previously designated heritage.

The definition of heritagisation and its application and development by scholars are of great significance to the development of this research. To be more specific, this study, given the concept of heritagisation, regards Chinese ICH Nüshu as a dynamic, socially-constructed process. This study specifically deliberates on how Nüshu becomes an ICH in China and how heritage elitism and institutionalisation play a role in heritagisation to manipulate the representation of the heritage through specific authentication mechanisms. The study of 'heritagisation' of Nüshu explores how the heritage is shaped and changed in China's specific political and socio-cultural context. A development is that, in comparison of the heritagisation of elitism, this study shows the heritagisation by the non-elitist and non-official heritage groups in order to demonstrate their heritage identities and discourses. Through a critical analysis, this study can investigate the recent social-political and social-cultural development of Chinese heritage and offer new insights for CHS with a series of critical, sociological reflections presented in the analysis of this research.

2.3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Heritage as an Analytical Perspective

In order to conduct the analysis of the identity and discourse of heritage actors, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method, which is derived from critical realism philosophy and has been employed to investigate numerous CHS, is considered as the analytical guidance for this research. Critical realism recognises the power of discourse and emphasises the social relationships that produce discourse (Fairclough et al., 2003). CDA can identify and understand how people organise and generate their actions through specific language use (Fairclough et al., 2004). CDA is not only an analysis of discourse, but also an analysis of the social and political context of specific discourse (Fairclough, 2003). If research aims to reveal the interrelationship between discourse and power, dominance, social hierarchy, gender relations, ideology and social identity, then CDA can be used as the analytical method (Wu and Hou, 2015; Waterton et al., 2006; Fairclough 2003). This follows the rationale of the analytical perspective of CDA in heritage research.

CDA provides a theoretical and methodological platform for heritage research to clarify the connections between heritage practices and discourse, as well as the interpersonal relationships, social behaviours and social issues implied by these connections (Smith, 2006). Waterton et al. (2006) reviewed the practicality of CDA as analytical methods in heritage research. The construction of discourse by identifying heritage can reveal the competitions and conflicts between different discourses, as well as the power relationship between heritage communities and experts (ibid). This identification and analysis of heritage discourse can help achieve fair dialogues and social inclusion among actors and resolve conflicts in the heritage field (ibid). Smith (2006) believes that heritage researchers can use CDA to analyse the characteristics of the dominant discourse in a heritage and the way in which it responds to a series of social practices, that is, to study how specific discourses constitute and shape various manifestations of heritage (Waterton et al., 2006).

In many heritage studies that apply CDA as the analytical perspective, CDA techniques are used to analyse international or national authoritative documents (Wu and Hou, 2015; Smith, 2006) such as charters, conventions, recommendations, legislation, etc. (Waterton et al., 2006). Waterton's (2010b) heritage studies used CDA to study the cultural policies and visual representations of heritage in Britain. Her research shows how AHD conceptualises and legitimises the Western-centric AHD. By conceptualising heritage as discourse, actions such as democratisation of heritage, community participation and social inclusion can be observed (Enqvist, 2014). Parkinson et al. (2016) conducted a critical discourse analysis of interviews with local heritage participants and found that collective memory and local characteristics are essential for non-expert heritage participants to understand the construction of heritage, which is also important for the building and maintaining of the local identity. Skrede and Hølleland (2018) consider the academic significance of the heritage research from the perspective of CDA and the philosophy of critical realism. They believe that many heritage scholars using CDA methods have criticised the repressive and non-

democratic AHD in their studies and advocated that the non-expert participants have the right to define their own heritage. Such reflections are consistent with the values of CDA. Skrede and Hølleland (2018) suggest that future heritage scholars retain their interest in CDA, as this method can help to unravel the hidden meanings behind the concept of AHD and help heritage scholars improve their self-awareness and self-criticism when conducting research.

Given the rationale of the CDA analytical perspective in heritage studies, this study adopts CDA to critically analyse the data achieved, which includes interviews of heritage participants, official documents, fieldwork records and so on. With the CDA perspective, heritage discourses, identities, power relations and resistances can be reflected on critically.

To conclude, the above sections link AHD in the Chinese context and the latitude of CHS, as well as the rationality of CDA in critical heritage research. In the next section, this study incorporates a more microlevel theoretical dimension to scrutinise the identity-making and discourse construction of the heritage participants in Nüshu. The following section provides a theoretical reflexion drawing on the notions of 'authenticity' and 'authentication' in the identity and discourse competitions in the Chinese ICH context, illustrating the nature of power conflicts among stakeholders.

2.4 Authenticity and Authentication in Heritage for Identity and Discourse

This section considers the liaison between identity-making and heritage discourses and authenticity and authentication competitions. Literature relating heritage authenticity to authentication is reviewed and the rationality of exploring identity and discourse issues in heritage with these concepts is demonstrated through the analysis.

2.4.1 Authenticity in Heritage: Multiple Theoretical Dimensions

The word 'authentic' conflates Greek and Latin terms that combined ideas of 'authoritative', something dictated from on high, and original, primordial and innate

(Lowenthal, 1995: 125). The term 'authenticity' refers to a quality of undisputed origin occurring in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original. It is a quality based on reliable facts and always relating to an emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive and responsible mode of human life. Authenticity connected with identity is people's search 'for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional—says more about us than about others' (Handler, 1986: 2). Persons are seen to be authentic if they are true to their roots or if their lives are a direct and immediate expression of their essence. Similarly, collectives are authentic if their biological heritage can be traced and if the members act in the proper, culturally valued manner (Lindholm, 2008).

In identification of cultural heritage, UNESCO's *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* formulated in 1977 highlights that cultural heritage must be tested for authenticity. The 'Test of Authenticity' (UNESCO, 2019: 90–91) referred to a series of parameters: design, material, workmanship and setting (ibid: 91). The focus on the authenticity of ICH was strengthened in later development. The World Heritage Committee Conference in 1992 proposed to re-evaluate the criteria for the authenticity and integrity of World Heritage and finally formed *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994). In the *Document*, the protection of authenticity is the concern for and protection of the overall culture, unifying the protection of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

In the academia, scholars have developed four dimensions of authenticity in heritage concerning tangible and intangible heritage, especially relating to such questions in heritage tourism. The four categories are: objective (or materialist) authenticity, constructive authenticity, existential authenticity (Dueholm & Smed, 2014; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Wang, 1999) and subjective authenticity (Su, 2018). Objective authenticity means the authentic experience that is based on the authenticity of originals (Wang, 1999: 352).

Object-related authenticity (objective and constructive) is perceived through tangible elements during travel, such as tourism products, architecture, food and so forth (Meng et al., 2019). It is argued that proponents of the objective dimension continue to fossilise/legitimise tangible and intangible heritage and offer a moral map (Chhabra, 2012). Scholars propose that the materialist or objective authenticity that exists in the Chinese Authorised Heritage Discourse is critiqued as inappropriate due to the over-emphasis on the historical original materiality of the tangible products (Su, 2018).

Second, Cohen (1988) proposed that authenticity is a constructed and negotiable concept that develops over time and the interpretation depends on the meaning of different scenarios. From this perspective, constructive authenticity refers to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by visitors or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc (Wang, 1999: 352). This dimension is closely connected with social-constructivist identities of practitioners (Chhabra, 2019).

Third, existential authenticity is activity-related that refers to the 'potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities' (Wang, 1999: 352). It is fulfilled through tourists' self-expression, not the authenticity of the object (Kim and Jamal, 2007). This aspect can be experienced in different kinds of objectively authentic settings (Chhabra, 2010) and concerns participants' subjective wellbeing, such as their identity-making, memory, power and so on (Su, 2018; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Wang, 1999). However, Zhu (2012: 1498) critiqued this aspect because it ignores the dynamic process of becoming authentic.

Fourth, given the statements that authenticity is a subjective experience generated in a dynamic performative process (Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Zhu, 2012), Su (2018) conceptualises 'subjective authenticity', describing the ability of ICH practitioners to freely and spontaneously convey their ICH values through cultural practices with their knowledge, skills, society (e.g., other people and community) and the natural

environment (e.g., tangible heritage and place). This aspect is developed to highlight the subjectivities of ICH practitioners in the making of ICH, their authentic identities and the dynamic, contingent and developing ICH values, as well as an inclusive understanding of authenticity in heritage (Su, 2018)

The above analysis on the definition of authenticity in heritage demonstrates the 'floating' aspect of the meaning of authenticity (Chhabra, 2019; Latham, 2016). The *Nara Document* encourages stakeholders in different cultural contexts to arrive at their own interpretations on authenticity according to their different cultural, political and economic conditions (Zhu, 2015). Authenticity is dynamic and fluid (Cohen, 1988), negotiated and performative (Chhabra, 2019; Zhu, 2015) and mediated and contested (Zhu, 2015). Recent scholarship has accordingly shifted the focus from the conceptual analysis of authenticity to the dynamic process of authentication (Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Xie, 2010; Macleod, 2006; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2005) and presented questions on how the authenticity of the ICH is negotiated (Khanom et al., 2019).

In this research, the theoretical angle relating authenticity and authentication issues in heritage Nüshu concerns the angle of subjective authenticity that emphasises the subjective heritage values in terms of the practices and identity-making by the heritage participants own their own. As this is a newly developed theoretical dimension, the academia still lacks sufficient discussions on theories concerning subjective authenticity in heritage. This research will develop the dimension of subjective authenticity and authentication, especially that of the non-official, non-authenticated heritage bearers in the Nüshu community, along with the notion of cool/hot authentication and such practices in the Chinese context.

2.4.2 'Cool/Hot Authentication' in Heritage

Authentication is defined as a process by which 'something, such as a role, product, site, object or event, is confirmed as original, genuine, real or trustworthy' (Cohen and Cohen, 2012: 3). In the field of ICH, the process through which an ICH practice is

deemed authentic is termed authentication (Khanom, et al, 2019). Zhu (2015: 12) argues that 'authentication has become a governance strategy to legitimise inclusion and exclusion and to allocate economic, moral and aesthetic values', in which the politics of authentication are generated in various cultural fields.

The concepts of 'hot' and 'cool' authenticity and authentication have been developed to distinguish diverse processes of authentication. Selwyn's (1996: 21–28) seminal distinction between hot and cool authenticity differentiate between a 'social' and a 'scientific' version of authenticity. Given this, Cohen and Cohen (2012) put forward the criterion of cool and hot authentication in heritage (see Table 1 below). They suggest that cool authentication is enacted with insignificant involvement of the public, its effectiveness being determined based on the reliability of the authenticating authority. Cool authentication is usually declarative and based on a testimony by national and international agencies, authorised institutions or individuals such as external experts and officials. It is highlighted that there are certain invisible, manipulative opportunities in the accomplishments of cool authentication. Cohen and Cohen (2012) suggest that cool authentication remains unclear and in default of a determined institutional or legal foundation. It is usually ambiguous as to who has the authority to authenticate specific cultural sites. Thus, the arena of cool authentication is at risk of manipulation and contestation.

Conversely, hot authentication is not explicitly ratified but socially yielded in a participatory process; it is usually an inherent, reiterative, unofficial, performative and self-reinforcing practice welcoming public participation. Hot authentication links with internal belief, commitment and devotion to a certain cultural object. It highlights the participation of the public. Hot authentication is not immobile but a self-motivated process. Compared with seemingly authorised procedures of cool authentication, hot authentication is normally an unnamed course of engagement, lacking a well-recognised authenticating agent (ibid).

Table 1. "Criterion of Hot and Cool Authentication" (Cohen and Cohen, 2012: 11)

Criterion	Cool authentication	Hot authentication
Basis of authority	Scientific knowledge claims, expertise, proof	Belief, commitment, devotion
Agent	Authorized person or institutions	No single identifiable agent, performative conduct of attending public
Approach	Formal criteria, accepted procedures	Diffuse and incremental
Role of public	Low, observer	High, imbricated, participatory
Practices	Declaration, certification, accreditation	Ritual, offerings, communal support, resistance
Temporality	Single act, static	Gradual, dynamic, accumulative
Conducive to personal experiences of	Objective authenticity	Existential authenticity
Continuance	Dependent on credibility of agent	Reiterative, requires continual (re)enactment
Impact on dynamics of attraction	Stagnating effect, fossilization	Augmentative and transformative

Scholars believe that authentication could to some extent increase the empowerment of the community. The concept of authorised authenticity is raised due to the fact that authenticity has been adopted and interpreted by both the governments and heritage bureaucracies in several heritage sites (Zhu, 2015). It is suggested that heritage authorities' appropriation of the concept of authenticity connects to the intersection of diverse heritage discourse (ibid). Ziff and Rao (1997: 1) define 'cultural appropriation' as 'the taking—from a culture that is not one's own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge'. It has been argued that cultural appropriation can harm the appropriated community, affect the integrity and identities of cultural groups and allow certain participants to benefit from the contributions of others (Ziff and Rao, 1997: 8–14). Culture may be transformed and rebuilt into an entirely different entity through appropriation. A consumer value system replaces an enduring community value system. The consumer value system often

distorts the original culture through unauthentic and inappropriate use of cultural resources, over which the community has little or no control (George, 2004).

George (2010) proposed the significance of investigating the ownership of ICH with a community-based approach considering the complexity of the issues around intellectual property rights and ownership in ICH. Various heritage listings, as the symbols of official authentication, might bring further conflicts over heritage ownership. The listings may be used as a 'patent' by the state for claiming to be the authentic owner of the heritage and proof of the heritage's origins. As Zhu (2015) argued, the authentication process aroused by the authenticity debate around heritage may lead to a hegemonic value system, which may aggravate the risks of commercialisation and fossilisation of the heritage.

The above review critically addresses some of the emerging theoretical dimensions in heritage authenticity and authentication. The proposed concepts around heritage authenticity need further reflection and testing (Su, 2018). Detailed investigations are required to better understand the linkage between ICH authenticity and community empowerment (Khanom et al, 2019). The scholarship needs to reveal the social processes of authentication by which authenticity is constructed in heritage as a new perspective (Cohen and Cohen, 2012) and explore ICH practitioners' perceptions in safeguarding ICH authenticity (Kim et al, 2019). Chinese heritage scholars also suggest further investigating how the Western-inspired notion of authenticity is borrowed, interpreted and practised in China (Zhu, 2015).

These concepts and theoretical dimensions lead this heritage research to comprehend and demonstrate the identity and discourse issues in heritage through probing the social meanings of authenticity and authentication in heritage. Such an exploration can be linked with AHD theories and enrich the theoretical latitude of CHS.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the guiding theoretical framework of this research. This framework contains multi-level theoretical perspectives from macro to micro. It is designed to explore the identity and discourse issues in China's Nüshu ICH community and the power negotiations among the stakeholders. This chapter first discusses a series of key concepts and theories. The relevance between heritage and identity has been noticed by many scholars. The meaning of heritage is constantly shaped and reshaped by the negotiations on the identity legitimisation in heritage (Smith, 2017). Cultural heritage has also been regarded as an issue related to the practice of discourse.

In this study, the critical dimension of heritage studies is specifically linked with the notion of AHD. Smith (2006) proposed the concept of AHD to analyse the discursive negotiations and power relations in heritage communities. The critical heritage research from the perspective of critical realism philosophy calls for attaching importance to people and communities who are marginalised in the formulation process of heritage policies and resist the narrative of elites (Morisset, 2017; Winter, 2013; 2014; ACHS, 2012). The 'heritagisation' process reflects politics involving various power and resource competitions from political, economic and cultural perspectives. However, the scholarship still lacks sufficient discussions on how different countries develop specific versions of their own AHDs, and how they use specific AHDs to reflect ideologies and values (Svensson and Maags, 2018). The heritagisation of heritage as well as the heritage politics in different social contexts deserve further study. Following the direction of this theoretical construction, this research, like many scholars who apply and develop AHD and CHS theories, uses CDA as an analytical perspective to explain the connection between heritage practice and discourse, especially to reveal the implications of power competition inside these connections.

This chapter then explores some micro-level theoretical aspects that can be developed in this study to clarify issues involving identity, discourse and power in a heritage community. At this level, notions of authenticity and authentication in heritage research are related to this research. The analysis of this research is more inclined to develop the

theoretical perspective of subjective authenticity in the field of intangible cultural heritage (Su, 2018). This study assumes that authenticity debates in heritage are related to the politics of authentication and explores the concept of cold/hot authentication (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). Based on these concepts, the analysis focuses on how members of the Nüshu heritage community use different powers and mechanisms to carry out unique cold/hot authentication for the authenticity debates and competitions.

In summary, this project is a critical heritage study focusing on identity, discourse and power competition in a Chinese context. The key significance of this research is that it uses the unique Nüshu culture as a case to explore not only the top-down, but also the bottom-up heritage discourse models inside the community, providing new analytical cases and theoretical constructions for China's heritage studies from a critical perspective. This research is going to broaden the depth and width of heritage studies considering the above discussed concepts and dimensions. To realise the analysis and theoretical construction using these three theoretical aspects, this project designed a series of targeted research methods to obtain substantial data, which is shown in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to get in touch with the genuine heritage community and the interior participants to cognise their sights into the power relations, discourse and identity dialogues and contests in the Nüshu community, this chapter outlines the procedure of data collection and data analysis. First, it demonstrates to what extent qualitative research guides the methodology of this study. Then, it evaluates the research methods utilised by scholars in similar heritage studies, including qualitative in-depth interviews, participatory observation and digital ethnography and reviews the significance of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in heritage studies. This chapter explains the rationale of collecting data through interview and observation; the principles and procedures of choosing participants, designing interview questions and carrying out face-to-face or online interviews; and the processes of visiting a heritage community through ethnographic fieldwork, accessing the daily routines of heritage participants and obtaining participant observation data. In addition, this chapter emphasises the significance of digital ethnography for data collection and establishes how this study carried out digital ethnography to investigate online heritage communities and members. It proposes an exhaustive heritage case study using digital ethnography in the Chinese social context.

This chapter then presents a general overview of CDA as the main data analysis method. It sheds light on the concepts and characteristics of CDA and why CDA is of unique significance to this study. This chapter clarifies the rationale and implementation of CDA in this study and demonstrates the process of transcription and coding. It shows how arguments are developed based on a number of first-hand raw data and how the research questions are resolved with the data gained through CDA. Finally, this chapter reflects on the researcher's position in the process of data collection and analysis and the ethical considerations of the study. Essentially, this chapter illuminates the methodology, methods and specific implementation procedures. To begin with, the

following section explains the significance of qualitative research to this study and how this study forms its research design.

3.1 Qualitative Approach to Heritage Studies

The concepts and characteristics of qualitative research, as well as its relationship with sociology and heritage studies, determine the scope of qualitative research in this study. Qualitative methodology refers to research that produces descriptive data such as people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviours (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015). Qualitative researchers pay attention to people's thoughts and behaviours in daily life and explore people's attachments and how they view things (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015: 18). Qualitative methodology is not just a set of data collection techniques, but a way to approach the empirical world (Rist, 1977; Babbie, 2014: 303–304), focusing on the generation and production of meaning (Krauss, 2005). Qualitative research is an inductive study in which researchers develop concepts, insights and understandings from patterns in data (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015: 18–24). Therefore, a holistic perspective is suggested in such research. It is worth noting that the methods in qualitative research are relatively flexible. Qualitative social scientists are encouraged to be their own methodologists (Mills, 1959). Guidance on qualitative methodology has never been a rule; researchers need to avoid becoming slaves to so-called 'research skills' and need to design flexible methods suitable for their own research and research objects (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015: 18–24). Qualitative research often occurs through case study, personal experience, introspection, life stories, interviews, artifacts and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactive and visual texts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3–4)

Qualitative research methods have been broadly used in cultural anthropology, ethnography, as well as heritage research. As Wax (1971: 35–36) noted, Malinowski was the first anthropologist to provide a description of his research approach and a

picture of what fieldwork was like. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when heritage practices and management had become public activities, there was a distinct Qualitative Shift in scholars' attitudes to the past (Sørensen and Carman, 2009). Later, ethnography, and more broadly, qualitative methods, became central methodologies in heritage research until recent decades (Filippucci, 2009).

Although there have been some scholars who encourage comparison or dialogue between qualitative and quantitative methods in heritage research to develop methodologies (Filippucci, 2009), Chambers (2000: 859) highlights that while research expects exact representations of stakeholders' values or opinions, data from qualitative ethnographic methods have often proven superior to survey data, especially in cases that involve long standing field exposure: 'Heritage professionals use ethnography, interviewing and qualitative research on a daily basis to inform their work' (Kersel, 2006: 17). This qualitative ethnographic research model requires researchers to observe people's social world on field sites and adopt corresponding analysis and writing models (Baszanger and Dodier, 1997). Heritage is an interdisciplinary field that deals with people, things and texts (Sørensen and Carman, 2009). Qualitative investigation methods can be applied for the purpose of 'conceptualisation' of heritage, because qualitative methods can record and analyse people's views, attitudes and motivations in heritage practices (Filippucci, 2009: 320).

Heritage research is interdisciplinary, and the investigation of heritage is likely to involve the expertise of other disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, architecture, art, history, psychology, sociology and tourism (Waterton and Watson, 2015). In recent years, increasingly literature has targeted heritage phenomena (e.g., Lowenthal, 1998; Smith, 2004). There are differences in ontology, epistemology and practice, and each method is affected by the setting of different goals and procedures (Sørensen and Carman, 2009). A number of methods have been introduced in heritage studies, such as semiotics, discourse analysis, various forms of interviews and participant observation, as well as the use of media and digital technology (ibid).

Several scholars have provided effective cases accomplished by ethnographic methods (Dicks, 2000; Breglia, 2006; Kersel, 2009; Palmer, 2009; Macdonald, 2013). On the other hand, data analysis from critical and discursive perspectives has been noticed by more and more heritage scholars (e.g., Smith, 2006; Waterton and Watson, 2015)

However, there are still research gaps that can be improved in heritage research methodology. As Sørensen and Carman (2009: 9) pointed out, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' method to be identified in heritage studies. Volumes are needed to elaborate how diverse methods can be used to investigate heritage and how interpretations can be constructed from data (Sørensen and Carman 2009: 4). The potential methodological contribution of this study lies in that a deeper understanding of data collection and analysis methods with digital ethnography and CDA in heritage studies can be offered.

3.2 Research Design

The research objectives and questions of this study need to be reaffirmed, and the significance of qualitative methods linked to the research design. This study demonstrates and explains the identity and discourse issues in the Nüshu heritage community. The interpretation is likely to reveal the power negotiation and resistance among heritage participants from both the official or non-official sides. Such purposes mean that this is a study investigating heritage participants, practices and the community. This is a process of understanding views, attitudes and emotions of people towards certain cultural objects. Given this purpose, qualitative data collection and analysis are determined to be the methodological guidance of this study.

Table 2 below shows the linkage between data and research questions, as well as the main stages of this study. This study's research questions indicate three dimensions: First is the social-political and social-cultural formation of Nüshu as heritage in contemporary China, which manifests the heritagisation process of the Nüshu heritage community. Second is the investigation of the official heritage discourse considering hierarchical and institutional facets. Third is the investigation of the folk heritage

discourse on new media platforms by the grassroot heritage participants. According to the three dimensions of research questions, research methods are configured respectively.

Table 2. Research Design

Stages	Qualitative Methodology	Research Activities	Research Questions Focus
1	Interview data collection	Purposefully select participants. Design interview procedures. Interview with participants.	Research question 1: from the perspective of sociology, how a Nushu heritage community is "made"? What is the essence and nature of this community?
2	Participant observation	Purposefully select fieldwork sites and participants. Record diaries, pictures, audio/video materials.	Research question 1: from the perspective of sociology, how a Nushu heritage community is "made"? What is the essence and nature of this community?
3	Digital ethnography	Purposefully select digital fieldwork sites and participants. Record digital data include conversations, articles, pictures, and online activities.	Research question 2.1 in Nushu field, how can the heritage discourse dominated by the state power be established through the debates of heritage authenticity?
			Research question 2.2 in Nushu field, how can the heritage discourse led by the folk indigenous community be established through the application of digital technology, and how can these participants build and claim their heritage identity?
4	CDA	Transcribe interview data. Gather all the textualised data together in Nvivo	Research question 2: from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, what heritage discourse can represent the heritage identities exist in this community? How do these discourse positions get "legitimacy" through the use of language?
5	Interpretation and reflection on the data	Writing findings	To all questions

To be more specific, the first dimension relates to the process of 'making' the Nüshu heritage field and the intrinsic system of this field. Therefore, I designed fieldwork, interviews with relevant stakeholders and ethnographic observation for this purpose (in Stages One and Two). The second dimension explains the embodiment of official heritage discourse. Although interview and observation methods are helpful to investigate this dimension, considering that it might not be easy to contact stakeholders with official background in the Chinese context, I decided on digital ethnography to obtain online discourse data such as the expressions of the local heritage custodians on social media. I also collected the official data by researching various official documents,

reports and so on. The third dimension illustrates the heritage democratisation achieved by the folk heritage discourse in the Nüshu field. For the reason that a large number of folk heritage participants interact on social media platforms, I used digital ethnography as the key access to engage in this dimension. I carried out long-term online participant observation in several Nüshu social media groups during 2017–2020. With different methods, I collected data for each dimension accordingly. After data collection, all the data were stored, classified and coded. CDA was applied to generate arguments and answer the research questions. The last stage was the joint interpretation, representation and reflection of the analysis results.

3.3 Qualitative Interview and Participant Observation

This section describes the application of qualitative, in-depth interview and participant observation in this study. Before depicting the interview and observation process, this section relates to the application and significance of these two methods in similar research, as well as the reasons why this study decides on these two methods.

Interview and participant observation are two data collection methods widely used in heritage research. As scholars point out, interviews are a crucial information mining tool for social researchers (Benney and Hughes, 1956; Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Social scientists rely on oral records to understand social life (Taylor and Bogdan, 2015). Qualitative interviews are flexible and dynamic. They have no limitations on direction, structure or standard. Such an open approach can help researchers to understand the opinions expressed by respondents about their lives, experiences or situations in their own language (ibid). As Seidman (2013: 9) points out, the root of the in-depth interview lies in understanding other people's life experience and the meaning they get from it.

Another method, participant observation, serving as 'a distinctive method and professional rite of passage' (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 4), is of great significance to anthropological fieldwork. This method relies on the cultivation of personal

relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture, involving both observing and participating in the social life of a group (Yin, 2011). This method is characterised by qualitative research, but the ways of participating and observing can vary widely from setting to setting (Schwartzman, 1993). In other words, a series of other qualitative methods can be mingled with observation, such as informal interviews, participation in group life, group discussion and so on. In observation, researchers often become members of cultures, groups or environments. The purpose of this is to give the researchers a deeper understanding of specific cultural customs, motivations and emotions.

A number of heritage scholars have applied both methods to their research. For example, in the Western context, Jones (2004) used an in-depth qualitative interview when investigating the significance and value of early medieval sculpture in the rural environment of Scotland (Hid of Cadboll). Further, Waterton (2010b) carried out in-depth interviews of key practitioners employed within the heritage sector and showed the politics of the heritage discourse in Britain.

In the context of China, there are already several heritage studies involving these two methods. Ateljevic and Doorne (2005) investigated the role of ethnic identities and their representation with ethnographic qualitative methods. They conducted dialogues, in-depth interviews and observations with local entrepreneurs and backpackers in Dali and its surrounding areas in China. Nitzky (2013) interviewed with the villagers, local officials and scholars in several heritage communities in Guizhou Province, China from 2008 to 2011 and examined the recent implementation of community-based participatory approaches to heritage work. In Maags' research concerning the ways government policies and administrative procedures foster cultural contestation between the state and ethnic groups (Maags, 2018a), she collected data by conducting several months of field work and engaging local officials, academics and cultural practitioners in semi-structured interviews. Maags (2018b) shows how local heritage policy implementation facilitates division and hierarchies among local stakeholders based on

the data acquired from 50 semi-structured interviews with local cultural practitioners, ICH officials as well as experts and her engagement in participant observation in China.

Chan's study (2018) selected 56 communities where the Ghost Festival in Guangdong, China had been held before for observation and hundreds of in-depth interviews were conducted with participants, worshippers, NGO workers, tourists and government officials. Bideau and Yan (2018) proved the role and power of different actors involved in the urban redevelopment and heritage management in Beijing. More than 30 local residents were interviewed to obtain people's attitudes toward regional heritage projects and the living conditions of the indigenous residents. Zhu's (2018b) research into the competitive nature of heritage acquired data from his ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Xi'an, China. A series of semi-structured interviews with local heritage authorities, scholars, local residents, business practitioners and domestic tourists were conducted to obtain people's attitudes and motivations in participating heritage practices.

Heritage scholars have adopted participant observation and interviews, especially semi-structured interviews, to obtain research data. Scholars are inclined to run field work in one or several related heritage sites for months or years. In this process, they usually interview dozens or hundreds of heritage participants, including practitioners, officials, experts, transmitters, residents, tourists and so on. Existing cases have shown that ethnographic, qualitative interviews and observation can effectively determine the issues related to the life, experience, emotion and motivation of heritage participants, as well as the state of heritage communities.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that interview and participant observation have long been classic methods for Nüshu anthropologists and sociologists. Anthropological fieldwork in Jiangyong is an essential task for Nüshu scholars to be acquainted with the heritage (see Liu, 2017; 2015; 2004a; 2004b; Lo, 2011; Lee, 2008; Zhao, 2005; 2004; 1992; Gong, 2007; 1995; 1983; Endo, 1999; Silber, 1995; Chiang, 1995). Many

of their observations (for example, Zhao Liming, Gong Zhebing, Liu Feiwen, Silber and Endo) have been going on for decades.

This study is motivated by the previous heritage works in its running methods. It is interested in exploring the milieu of ecosystem of the Nüshu field through qualitative in-depth interviews and observation to discover the daily life and work of Nüshu participants including Nüshu Transmitters, business practitioners, heritage officials, scholars and villagers in the indigenous community. The implementation of the fieldwork, procedures of qualitative interviews and participant observation of this study are presented in the following sections.

3.3.1 Recording Fieldwork Sites

Visiting the Nüshu Village and the Ecological Museum

Fieldwork in the Nüshu Village in Jiangyong County, Hunan Province, China is an indispensable step in this study. In the second year of this project, this fieldwork was carried out during July and November 2018. Per the recommendation of a transmitter, the summer vacation is usually the period when Nüshu Museum welcomes the highest number of tourists and the annual Nüshu Learning Class is usually held during this time in the museum.

In July 2018, I came to Jiangyong County, located in the southwest corner of Hunan Province, for fieldwork. After getting off the train, I went directly to a residence in the Nüshu village, a family guesthouse called 'Nüshu family (女书之家)'. This residence was just five minutes away from Nüshu Museum, and several Nüshu Transmitters' homes were also in the vicinity. In the following days, my footprints touched the Puwei Nüshu village, the town of Shangjiangxu, the county of Jiangyong, as well as several nearby villages.

In the village, I visited Nüshu Museum and observed the construction of the village. I not only went to see all the authenticated transmitters' families but also the other

villagers to determine their stances on the change and renovation of the village in the past decades. I sauntered along the Yongming River, the red suspension bridge that connects the village and the outside world, and the straight cement gravel road that was specially built for the infrastructure of the village's cultural heritage tourism. I entered the vegetable plots and orchards by the side of the gravel road. I recorded every detail I witnessed with my camera and notebook.

In the past two decades, the dilapidated Nüshu village has been rebuilt into an 'Ecological Museum'. According to the local residents, twenty years ago, all the houses in the village were shabby. There were no concrete roads. Household waste and livestock faeces were everywhere on the muddy roads. Now, this village has a completely new outlook (see Figure 6). Connected from the entrance to the village is a smooth concrete road with magnificent stone carvings, decorative lanterns and freshly painted walls embellished with Nüshu classic symbols such as Nüshu folding fans and octagonal flowers. Passing a painted wooden suspension bridge and a long gravel road lined with farmland, there is an antique Chinese-style building, which is the main structure of the Nüshu Museum. The room on the left-hand side is a room for exhibition, painting and calligraphy. The walls in this room are filled with a variety of Nüshu calligraphy works. In the middle of the room is a huge calligraphy table filled with brush pens, ink and paper. Nüshu transmitters who work in the museum often complete their Nüshu calligraphy and artworks here. On the left side of this room is a space for teaching and exhibition. This space is equipped with four rows of desks and chairs and a large blackboard and can accommodate 30 visitors at a time. Several Nüshu artworks are hanging on the walls, most of them embroideries and handicrafts. Once visitors come to the museum, Nüshu Transmitters or the tour guides of the museum will lead visitors to this classroom, sing a Nüshu song for them and let them learn a few Nüshu scripts. These activities have become one of the routines of the 'Museum Tour'. There is a souvenir shop on the ground floor. There are many extraordinary Nüshu artworks on the counters, including calligraphies and paintings, embroideries and handicrafts, as

well as Nüshu textbooks. The offices, toilets, as well as a simple kitchen, are also located on the first floor.

Figure 6. The Entrance of the Nüshu Village (photograph taken by the author in August 2018)

On the second floor of the building, there are several showrooms. The illustrations of the showrooms start by introducing the Jiangyong area. Along the exhibition route, they then introduce Nüshu's rediscovery in the 1980s and Chinese and foreign scholars' attention to Nüshu. Also displayed are Nüshu's customs and rituals such as 'ku jia' (哭嫁, wedding crying) and 'zuo ge tang' (座歌堂, sitting singing halls) and Nüshu's literary exhibits such as letters among sworn sisters. The exhibitions also show the efforts of some significant Nüshu Transmitters who helped heritage scholars to understand the scripts and culture. In addition, the showrooms exhibit old farm tools and old furniture used by people in the past, which seemed not that relevant to Nüshu. The intention of exhibiting these unrelated items is to enrich the exhibition contents, as there are not enough original Nüshu objects collected in the museum. During my visit to the museum, the lights and air conditioners in the exhibition rooms were turned on until the guide (a Nüshu Bearer) took me to the second floor. When there were no visitors, the electrical devices in these exhibition rooms were not switched on in order reduce the electricity costs.

Visiting Jiangyong County

Jiangyong County was about 20 minutes' drive from the Nüshu village. I often spent five RMB to take the old rural buses to travel from the village to the county, a price that was much higher than that of the public transportation in most of Chinese cities (usually 1–2 RMB). On the buses, I often met ragged vegetable farmers who were going to sell their fresh vegetables in the county. Many Nüshu participants lived in the county rather than the village, such as He Jinghua, a national Nüshu Transmitter who has reconstructed her personal residence into a cultural space called 'Jinghua Nüshu Hall'. Hundreds of her Nüshu handwritings, artworks and handiworks in this space are evidence for this elderly Nüshu Transmitter's Nüshu experience. I also visited He Jinghua's daughter Pu Lijuan, who is also an official Nüshu Transmitter. Just like her mother, Lijuan transformed her residence into the 'Pu Lijuan Nüshu Hall'. In this hall on the main street of Jiangyong County, Lijuan has conducted many Nüshu activities, such as delivering Nüshu courses, treating visitors and selling Nüshu works and local specialties.

In the county, I also visited the 'Nüshu Hotel', which was one of the largest and most affluent hotels in the county. Mr. Tao, the founder and CEO of the hotel, accepted my interview invitation. He recounted his Nüshu experience, especially how he transformed the cultural capital of Nüshu into an economic and symbolic capital for the hotel business. I also visited the Nüshu Management Department of Jiangyong County Government. There I met some custodians in local heritage governance and obtained recent official documents on Nüshu tourism development and construction plans for the Nüshu Ecological Museum and the local cultural festivals.

I then moved into a few other villages around Jiangyong. I visited Zhou Shuoyi's (one of the discoverers of Nüshu, see Chapter One, 1.2) former residence (see Figure 7) in Zhoujiabang Village, Yunshan Town, Jiangyong County. I met his sister, Zhou Huijuan, who was authenticated as the official Nüshu Transmitter, and Zhou Shuoyi's daughter,

Zhou Jinger. Although Zhou Jinger had not achieved any official designation, she had devoted her life to the awareness and preservation of Nüshu through her own efforts.

Figure 7. The former residence of Zhou Shuoyi and her sister, Zhou Huijuan, a Nüshu Transmitter (photograph taken by the author in August 2018)

Another remarkable village is Heyuan village. This village is about 15 km away from Jiangyong County and 7 km away from the Nüshu Ecological Museum. I paid for a private car to help me go back and forth between this village and the Museum. The purpose was to visit the mysterious but significant Nüshu Transmitter He Yanxin. Before the fieldwork, I had taken note of this name and even learned about her life through extensive Nüshu literature. When I arrived in Jiangyong, however, I found it was not easy to get in touch with her because she seemed not interested in meeting visitors from outside. During my fieldwork, many Nüshu bearers suggested I visit Yanxin and present their respects to this old transmitter, reflecting the influence and prestige of Yanxin in the community. With the help of three Nüshu bearers, Hu Xin, Yi Yunjuan and Hu Qiangzhi, I was able to contact and make an appointment with this old transmitter.

The journey to Jiangyong allowed me to obtain a large number of substantial data through immersion into this heritage community. However, Jiangyong was not the only fieldwork site; I also decided on Changsha as another location for data collection.

Changsha as a New Focus Site

The motive for choosing this location is that Nüshu is now no longer a secret female script in Jiangyong's rural area. Nüshu's progression towards nationalisation and globalisation has already made this culture well-known throughout the country. Some Nüshu practitioners have set up specific Nüshu cultural spaces in metropolises in China, such as Changsha, Wuhan, Chengdu, Beijing and Wuxi. Nüshu participants' heritage practices in cities, especially metropolises, are quite different from those in the indigenous community in Jiangyong. Changsha, the capital city of Hunan Province, has several Nüshu cultural spaces such as private and institutional Nüshu galleries, creative cultural industries such as handicraft supplies and a customised clothing shop. These particular sites show cultural practitioners' innovations in the communication and commercialisation model of ICH.

The second motive is that Changsha has not received enough academic attention from previous Nüshu researchers, who were more inclined to devote their efforts to the indigenous Jiangyong area. Today, it is worth noting that Nüshu is not only alive in its historically indigenous region but also exists in more and more modern cities in China. Nüshu is experiencing resurgence in the course of the enlargement of its cultural creative industry and cultural exchange activities in these cities. Therefore, I carried out my fieldwork in Changsha from September to October 2018. During this period, I explored several specialised spots for cultivating the ICH cultural creative industry. I visited an officially authenticated Nüshu Promotion Ambassador and several Nüshu practitioners and scholars. I also participated in several emblematic cultural communication activities and academic events for heritage.

My journey in Changsha started with my visit to a clothing studio called 'Nüshu Fang (女书坊)'. This was an advanced custom clothing studio. Nüshu scripts and its traditional ornamental patterns such as 'ba jiao hua (八角花, which means the octagon flower)' were used by the designers as decorative cultural symbols for clothing designs. The founder of the studio was a graduate of Hunan Women's University. I visited the studio, learned about their business model, saw how they negotiate with customers and witnessed their application of different forms of Nüshu figures in their designs. Here I interviewed not only the founder, but also Mr. Zhou Hongjin, an Associate Professor of Hunan Women's University who has sustained his Nüshu research for decades. He shared his Nüshu experiences, especially how he expanded Nüshu dissemination and heritage protection through guiding undergraduates' cultural entrepreneurship projects, and how he discovered talented researchers for developing Nüshu studies in colleges and universities.

Then, I visited a Nüshu Promotion Ambassador (女书文化宣传大使) authenticated by Jiangyong County Government. This Ambassador runs a private Nüshu art gallery in Changsha. She has done Nüshu cultural creative work for many years, devoting herself to linking Nüshu cultural symbols with traditional Chinese arts such as Chinese calligraphy, painting, embroidery and porcelain. Her gallery was a private cultural space covering an area of around 70 square meters. In her gallery, there were a number of intricate Nüshu creative artworks such as paintings, calligraphies, porcelains, folding fans, embroideries and Nüshu oil paper umbrellas. There was a large calligraphy table with various writing brushes, ink sticks, ink slabs and rice paper where artists could freely create their calligraphy and painting works when they came to the cultural space. There was also an antique tea table where she treated visitors and artists. During my visits in Changsha, the 'Nüshu Culture and Art Festival' was ongoing, in which the 'Nüshu Painting and Calligraphy Competition' was one of the programmes of the festival. The Ambassador was the organiser of this event. With her invitation and

encouragement, I participated in this competition and completed a Nüshu calligraphy piece with her guidance.

Further, I visited another private Nüshu cultural creative space located in Changsha Yuhua Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum. The founder of the Nüshu cultural space was a folk Nüshu bearer. It was a 30-square-meter multi-functional space with several display cabinets, painting tables and folding chairs. According to the founder, this space could not only be used as a display of Nüshu cultural creative products but also be easily transformed into a Nüshu classroom for group tourists and students.

An unexpected experience in Changsha was that I participated in the 'World Language Resources Protection Conference'. This was a three-day international conference in terms of world cultural and language protection. Nüshu, as a unique female script at the edge of extinction, became one of the foci of this conference. At this conference, I was able to learn the national and international preservation strategies and policies in language heritages. This conference broadened my research perspectives in that it improved my critical, dialectical reflections on the latest local, national and international heritage strategies and their implementations. In addition, I interviewed Professor Zhao Liming, a prominent Nüshu scholar of Tsinghua University, at this conference, which allowed me to obtain critical opinions in heritage development from a leading Nüshu scholar.

This section presents numerous activities during the field research. The field trip indicated that Nüshu heritage practices have different characteristics between the indigenous region and the urban area. The observations of and comparisons between these two fieldwork sites provided this research with extraordinary facts and various unmarked viewpoints. During the fieldwork, dozens of Nüshu cultural participants were interviewed. The interview procedures, interviewees and the gains are presented below.

3.3.2 In-depth Interview Participants

Most of the semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted from July to November 2018. Diverse means of interviews were employed, including one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews, interviews with participants through social media platform WeChat and so on. There were also a few interviews before and after the fieldwork, such as an in-depth WeChat interview with a Nüshu transmitter in March 2018 and two auxiliary interviews conducted after I returned to the UK from China as supplements to enrich and ensure the integrity and reliability of the data.

After the first interview, I realised that excessive time and queries should be avoided in the following interviews. To be more specific, the interviewer should not plan too many interview questions and expect the interviewee to address them in an hour and a half because the interviewee would not be given enough time to think deeply about each question, which ultimately resulted in very superficial answers. Fontana and Frey (2000) encourage researchers to become an active audience in interviews. The purpose of the researcher in an interview is to have a detailed and comprehensive dialogue with the interviewee to understand his/her language and culture. Given that, the other interviews in this study became more open and semi-structured. The framework of interview questions was compressed to ensure that interviewees could deal with them easily and deeply. They were given more time for self-reflection during the process. Hence, the in-depth interviews conducted in this study were not rigid Q&A processes, but a personalised knowledge exchange between the interviewer and the interviewees (Hess-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

In many heritage studies, interviewees usually consider heritage practitioners, officials, experts, transmitters, local residents and tourists. The interviewees in this study cover the following categories: officially authenticated Nüshu Transmitters and Promotion Ambassadors, folk indigenous Nüshu bearers, heritage officials, scholars, as well as villagers in the indigenous community. Each of the categories' planned sampling size

was 5 to 8 respondents. At the stage of research design, the sampling size limit was not in place but was relied on when the data became saturated.

Before the fieldwork trip, I spent three months designing the details of interviews and observation, including selecting and recruiting interviewees, designing interview questions, providing documents for ethical considerations and connecting with some of the gatekeepers and interviewees. I realised the importance of gaining approval from the community gatekeepers before entering the indigenous heritage community for the reason that a researcher's unexpected and hasty intrusion into a closed hamlet may cause insiders' antipathy, thus having an counterproductive effect on the data quality. It was needed to seek a gatekeeper from the heritage community at the outset and then enter the community under the direction of the gatekeeper.

When conducting the background analysis and literature analysis of the study, I noticed several names of Nüshu people repeatedly appearing in articles and books. I tried many ways to make contact with these people, such as looking for their emails, addresses and phone numbers on the Internet. It was not easy to get in touch with them until I searched for the keyword 'Nüshu' on the QQ and WeChat platforms (two prevailing social media in China). I was surprised to find a number of online Nüshu groups embracing hundreds of Nüshu participants who were official and non-official transmitters, scholars, practitioners and custodians. Most of these online societies were restricted; individuals were requested to deliver specific authentication information to obtain approval from the group administrators before entering. I was able to join in some of these online groups because I sent my personal information to some of the administrators to demonstrate my identity and intention. Participating in these digital heritage member groups meant that I was able to directly access the gatekeepers of the heritage communities as well as several potential interviewees. I contacted a young official Nüshu Transmitter (Respondent 16) on QQ who later became one of my gatekeepers to the Nüshu community. She not only accepted my interview invitation but also helped me to make contact with other Nüshu participants to get involved in my research.

With the backing of a few gatekeepers, a 'snowball' sampling strategy was applied to foster the list of interviewees. Snowball sampling can effectively help researchers to enter some hidden and specific populations (Voicu, 2011). Researchers are using their own networks to get a list of respondents. For example, with the endorsement of my first interviewee, who is an official transmitter, I was introduced to and acquainted with not only all the officially authenticated transmitters, but also some of the employees in the Nüshu Ecological Museum and local heritage officials. Many of them ultimately became the interviewees for the research.

However, one of the disadvantages of snowball sampling is selection bias (Atkinson and Flint, 2011). Specifically, the subjective choice of the first interviewee greatly affects the quality of sampling, which may lead to biased samples (Griffiths et al, 1993) and researchers may miss independent individuals who have no relationship with the first respondent or with the researchers themselves (Van Meter, 1990). In this study, the first gatekeeper I got in touch was an authenticated Nüshu Transmitter with an official background. Thus, I was able to meet several participants who also carry certain official warrants, such as the other authenticated transmitters and custodians. If only counting upon such a snowball strategy, participants who are unofficial, unauthorised, indigenous grassroots might be excluded from my interviewees list.

Therefore, after interviewing with some participants from snowball sampling, I turned back to social media networks to search for the participants from the indigenous folk heritage community. Luckily, I discovered a number of online groups on QQ and WeChat organised by folk Nüshu participants. I obtained consent from the gatekeepers and entered these groups. These groups allowed me to enlist interviewees from the folk heritage community.

Table 3 below gives the information on the respondents in this study. It is worth noting that this critical heritage study thesis cannot sidestep participants' criticism on existing heritage issues surrounding the community, members, governance and so on. In order

to protect the respondents, their real names are replaced with numbers and their social identities are also concealed (a more detailed discussion on ethical issues is presented in Section 3.7).

Through searching for gatekeepers and interviewees on social media and in the fieldwork sites with the snowballing strategy, this research gained interviewees from both official and indigenous backgrounds, including authenticated transmitters, indigenous heritage bearers, local and provincial heritage custodians, external heritage experts, as well as local residents. Therefore, this study obtained broad and comprehensive voices from the heritage insiders. Individuals and groups who were deemed 'sensitive' and overlooked in the past by the academia will be discussed in this study. The data from this study reflect a discursive balance.

Table 3. List of Interview Respondents

Labels of Respondents	Groups	Ways of Interview and Locations
Respondent 1	Heritage Custodian	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 2	Heritage Custodian	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 3	Heritage Custodian	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 4	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 5	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 6	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 7	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 8	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 9	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 10	Nüshu Practitioner	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 11	Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 12	Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 13	Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter	WeChat Video Interview
Respondent 14	Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter	WeChat Video Interview

Respondent 15	Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Wuhan
Respondent 16	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 17	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 18	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 19	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 20	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 21	Official Nüshu Transmitter	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Jiangyong
Respondent 22	Scholar	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Wuhan
Respondent 23	Scholar	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 24	Scholar	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Changsha
Respondent 25	Scholar	Face to Face In-depth Interview in Wuhan

3.3.3 Interview Process

Face-to-face Interview

I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with most of the selected respondents. All the interviews in this study were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews have been widely used in qualitative research (Edwards and Holland, 2013: 2–3). They are more flexible compared with structured interviews. Researchers need to design a basic framework of topics and questions before the interview (ibid: 29). The loose structure of the basic questions allows the interviewees the space to further express themselves. The interviewer is also given space to ask extra questions during the interview, which encourages the interviewees to provide more valuable information for qualitative research.

Before each interview, I confirmed the attendance of the interviewees and the date and location to meet. I usually asked the interviewees to choose a place themselves to ensure that they felt relaxed during the interview process. Most of the interviews were conducted in the workplace of the interviewees, such as the exhibition room or offices

in the Nüshu Ecological Museum, their private Nüshu galleries, school or government offices and so on. Some of the interviews were conducted at their homes.

At the start of each interview, I usually had an informal conversation with the interviewee as a warm-up and ice breaking process. Then I let them know the research topics, interview procedures, time length, as well as my personal information so as to diminish their doubts about me. I fully informed them that the interview would be recorded and might be published for academic purposes. I provided them with a Consent Form and a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1–2) and asked them to check these two sheets and sign their names on the form to indicate their approval to be included in this study.

After obtaining the interviewees' basic personal information, such as their occupation, age, education experience and so on, we entered the process of the in-depth interview. All the interviews were carried out based on the interview framework to address analogous topics and questions. To be more specific, the semi-structured interview questions mainly included:

> When did you start your Nüshu activities?
>
> How did you implement your Nüshu practices?
>
> What roles do you think you are playing in the Nüshu community?
>
> What achievements and regrets have you experienced?
>
> How do you think of your identities in the community?
>
> What social impacts do you think you have achieved so far through your heritage practices?
>
> How do you evaluate the transformation of Nüshu during the past 30 years?

These seemingly broad topics gave the interviewees certain space for self-reflection and the researcher was provided space for asking follow-up questions. Based on the semi-structured agenda, the extended questions were intended to go into the contemplations of these heritage participants on their heritage identity and the politics

of heritage-making in this community. These aspects were connected with the research questions and purposes of this study. Each interview lasted one hour on average. Given the down-to-earth experiences of this study, it was found that limiting each interview to an hour makes the respondents feel more at ease and the time is long enough for the researcher to execute the interview framework.

Most of the participants showed passion in engaging in the conversations with the researcher. They were very likely to share their personal heritage experiences and achievements. For some sensitive topics such as heritage governance and politics, most respondents were willing to express their views, while a few of them demonstrated a reluctant attitude. At this time, it is suggested to change topics and avoid excessive questioning so as to avoid offending the respondents and making them nervous. After each interview, I asked the interviewee whether they would like to keep in touch with me through social media and most of them accepted. Besides face-to-face interviews, several interviews were conducted over the Internet.

Interview Via Digital Forms

Interviews in digital forms mainly relied on WeChat as the communication tool. Online interviews via WeChat seemed more accessible than other platforms. This was not only because WeChat has been a social application widely used by people throughout the country, but personal social contact with some interviewees had also already been established through this application before data collection. Online interviewees were a few Nüshu participants who did not live in the fieldwork sites but warrant focus. In addition, a few WeChat interviews were conducted for data supplement after I returned to the UK. I chose to have audio chats with these interviewees on WeChat's PC version. Before each online interview, I confirmed with the interviewees whether they were in a good Internet environment.

These online interviews followed the same framework and procedures as the offline interviews. It seemed that the online interviewees were more interested in elaborating

their critical viewpoints and in-depth discussions in terms of some sensitive questions and issues. To be more specific, the online interviewees were more straightforward in casting their doubts on some of the issues in current heritage development and governance, criticising some of the unfair treatments they had suffered, and even frankly pointing out what actors or practices caused these problems. The online interviews in this research provided me several authentic and trustworthy insights from the heritage participants. In general, both participatory and ethnographic observation, face-to-face interviews and online interviews were carried out without issues.

3.4 Digital Methods in Social Sciences

Digital methods refer to the use of online digital technologies to collect and analyse research data. Digital methods have been employed by various academic disciplines. Digital and network methods have been used in social science research for a long time. Digital methods at an early stage include online survey (Coomber, 1997), online focus group, online questionnaire, and social network analysis. Online interview has been most widely used by scholars, which is divided into synchronous online interview and asynchronous online interview (Chen and Hinton, 1999) and an online research method of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) that uses instant messaging, e-mail, or video to achieve the purpose of interview (Salmons, 2014). There are also other forms of online digital research methods such as online content analysis, which is a form of content analysis used to analyse Internet-based communication using a series of research technologies to describe and infer online materials through systematic coding and interpretation (McMillan, 2000).

Online questionnaire survey is normally a structured survey. The target audience usually fills in the forms published on the Internet, and the data is stored in the database. Online questionnaire tools used by researchers can usually provide a certain degree of data analysis (Evans and Mathur, 2018). Social network analysis (SNA) is a process of using networks and graphs to study social structure. The analysis focuses on the

participants and things in the network and the links connecting them to prove the network structure and community (Otte et al, 2002). This method has become a key technology in social science research.

With the further development of digital research in social sciences, current literatures on digital research methods emphasize the role of digital technology as an intermediary participating in people's daily life (Murthy, 2008). Specifically, on the one hand, some scholars began to use online digital methods to study specific topics or specific groups. A series of methodological concepts about virtual and digital ethnography are proposed, such as ashypermedia and multimodal ethnography (Mason & Dicks, 2001; Dicks et al 2006); cyberethnography (Teli,et al, 2007); netnography (Kozinets, 2002) and digital ethnography (Murthy, 2008). Digital ethnography is an online research method derived from ethnography. In digital ethnography, a large amount of data comes from the digital memory of naturally occurring public conversations recorded by contemporary communication networks. This method is rooted in the tradition of anthropology and is an interpretative research method (Kozinets, 1998). Digital ethnography research focuses more on the observation and reflection of human online communication as the data provided by online communities. Online ethnography researchers can download communication data directly from online communities. This method is cheaper and more timely than many other methods, and can investigate a large number of people and communities.

On the other hand, some studies use digital methods to focus on life and online experience. Boyd (2009) and Anderson (2007) reflect the transformation from Web1.0 to Web2.0, which is a kind of non-participatory network from top-down to socialised and participatory network. Individuals begin to create and share online multimedia content on the Internet platform.

Digital methods are significant to this study since the very beginning. On the one hand, in 2016, I initially relied on digital forms to enter Nüshu community and began to realise the importance of digital heritage community for the practice and development of this heritage. On the other hand, the distance between China and the UK means that researchers cannot visit the heritage community with high frequency. Participating in and observing the digital community is an effective way to track the development, negotiation and problems of the heritage community. This method demonstrates the remarkable characteristics of digital ethnography method as it mainly studies the actors and their interactions within online communities through naturalistic participation and observation, and tries to prove the historical development of specific communities by collecting and describing rich data of online community practices.

The online methods mentioned above, such as online survey, online interview, online observation group and social network analysis, have limitations in different degrees. Specifically, the limitation of the online survey is that the number of community participants expected to be studied in this study is relatively small, and the researcher may not be able to obtain sufficient online questionnaire responses. Online interview and focus group have not become the main research methods because some representative inheritors who are at advanced ages cannot operate online communication well. Although SNA enables researchers to better understand how individuals connect and how information flows online, this method relies too much on the use of professional skills and technological tools and somewhat ignores the interaction and dialogue outside the online social network, as a result, SNA is still not suitable for this study. Compared with other digital methods, digital ethnography can provide rich and multi-dimensional data on the actions, interactions, and emotions of community participants as well as the transformation of the community.

3.5 Digital Ethnography Exploring Heritage Nüshu

Besides the fieldwork in diverse sites and a series of in-depth interviews, this research also conducted a digitally ethnographical observation of Nüshu's virtual community on various social media during 2017–2020 for data collection. This method embraced the overall trend of digitalisation nationwide and worldwide and allowed this research to gain a long-term picture of the transformation of this heritage and the most up-to-date heritage practices by its participants. This section presents how digital ethnography was applied in this study.

Heritage scholars are no strangers to digital ethnography. With the wide spread of social media, the Internet has become increasingly integrated into people's daily practices. Hallett and Barber (2014: 307) highlight the significance of digital measures to ethnographic research in that 'it is no longer imaginable to conduct ethnography without considering online spaces'. Heritage scholars are increasingly interested in how people express and create their own heritage landscape through rich participation, social relationships and ways of using mobile phone cameras (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 54). In recent years, various styles of online ethnography have been developed and labelled with different names such as virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), Internet ethnography (Miller and Slater, 2001), cyber-ethnography (Escobar, 1994), digital ethnography (Murthy, 2008) and ethnography of virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al., 2012).

Many scholars have put forward their views on the implementation of digital ethnography in social research. Scholars believe that like the offline world, the online world is also composed of communities. These communities are not only virtual entities, but also real and complex social forms that have a specific impact on participants' lives (Kavanaugh and Patterson, 2001; Komito, 1998; Jones, 1995). One of the main tasks for ethnographic researchers is to discover and study these online communities and observe and participate in the social practices of community members so as to understand their common culture (Caliandro, 2018).

A number of digital ethnography research projects instructed the research methods of this study. For example, Boyd (2015) investigates American youth culture and youth community by means of browsing youths' social networks and blogs, reading their tweets and observing their online footprints. In the study by Bluteau (2019), prevailing social media platform Instagram becomes a digital ethnography site for academic purposes. Androutsopoulos (2008) investigates visits to German based websites by hip hop and diaspora groups through online observation and online interviews. In the context of China, Chinese citizens are increasingly using digital technologies to record, celebrate and debate local traditions and heritage (Svensson, 2018). Svensson (2018) carried out digital ethnography to examine the impact of WeChat groups on heritage communities and participants and points out that members in online heritage communities are likely to display emotions by sharing stories, emotions, experiences and images or liking and commenting on posts related to heritage.

The advantages of digital ethnography have been proven by ethnographers and heritage scholars. Digital methods can effectively stimulate and support ethnographic practices, especially in exploring the complex patterns of Web 2.0 (Rheingold, 1994); compared with the virtual community, social media platforms have a wider range of mobility and dispersion to fill in Web 1.0[18] (Rheingold, 1994), which is generally regarded as the main field of research by online ethnographers (Postill and Pink, 2012). The online ethnography method has convincingly illustrated its flexibility. On the one hand, it can effectively adapt to the online environment, but on the other hand, it still needs to be constantly reformed according to the latest characteristics and changes of the online environment (Pink et al., 2015; Robinson and Schulz, 2009).

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[18] Web 1.0 refers to the first stage of the World Wide Web evolution. In the early stages, there were only a few content creators in Web 1.0 with the huge majority of users being consumers of content. Four design essentials of a Web 1.0 site include: 1. Static pages. 2. Content being hosted on the server's file-system. 3. Pages built using Server Side Includes or Common Gateway Interface (CGI). 4. Frames and tables being used to position and align the elements on a page.

Nevertheless, some scholars have put forward views critical of this method. Caliandro (2018) argues that social media has guided and limited the scope of ethnographers' actions to some extent. Ethnographers are not recommended to study social communities by simply interacting with the online components (Boyd, 2015). Many scholars have proposed a research method combining online and offline ethnography, emphasising the continuity and mutual significance of the two (Kelty, 2008; Wilson, 2006; Muñiz and Schau, 2005; Gatson and Zweerink, 2004; Leander and McKim, 2003). It is suggested that even if a researcher is focusing on a certain online community, the meaning of having face-to-face communication with the participants offline should not be ignored.

A methodological gap can be found in that there is still a lack of discussion on the latest application of digital ethnography in heritage studies in the Chinese context. The significance and influence of various social media platforms and online communities on heritage practices in China have not been systematically investigated. This research can methodologically and theoretically contribute to such an empty space. This section demonstrates how this study carried out digital ethnography to discover the Nüshu heritage community online and the advantages and disadvantages of this method.

3.5.1 Purposeful Selection of Digital Ethnographic Sites

This study did not adopt digital ethnography as a key research method from the outset. At the beginning of this study, I did not fully perceive the value of digital platforms as a channel of ethnographic observation for this study. I did not engage in the authentic digital ethnography in Nüshu until I met a few gatekeepers and joined in several Nüshu social media communities. As mentioned earlier, these online heritage groups were restricted and had certain entry barriers. I was able to enter since my verification information was recognised by the gatekeepers. I started a three-year digital ethnographic observation of the social media communities for heritage from early 2017.

The choice of digital ethnographic sites was purposeful. In the digital world, there were hundreds of Nüshu-themed social media groups launched by participants from different backgrounds and it was impractical to observe all of them in this study. Thus, a purposeful selection of the online ethnographic sites was indispensable.

In order to select the most appropriate sites for the study, I first browsed all the Nüshu online platforms that I could access, including Nüshu WeChat and QQ groups, the WeChat Official Account, Nüshu-themed video websites and blogs. During this period, the factors I considered the most for selection included the vitality of the sites, numbers of participants, social influence and the amount of content. After repeated comparisons, I finally selected four online platforms that illustrated the highest vitality, the largest number of participants, a continuous renewal of content and fairly far-reaching social impact. Table 4 shows the four platforms selected as the focal digital ethnographic sites of this study.

3.5.2 Process of Digitally Ethnographic Observation

Digitally ethnographic observation began in March 2017. I searched for the keyword 'Nüshu' on one of China's most popular social media platforms, QQ, and discovered numerous QQ groups with the theme of Nüshu. I sent my requests to the gatekeepers immediately and was allowed to join in. I first joined in two QQ groups, named 'China's Nüshu World's Heritage（中国的女书世界的遗产）' and 'Long-feet Scripts Nüshu Communication Group (长脚文字女书交流群)'. Among these groups, I was able to get in touch with a number of eminent Nüshu participants, especially those young Nüshu transmitters and practitioners who were active on the Internet. However, these two groups were not active enough; there was a lack of interaction among the internal members. Hence, these two online groups were not decided on as the main online observation sites.

When I was invited to other Nüshu online groups by the members I encountered in the first two groups, my observation sites expanded from QQ to WeChat. The groups that

I later connected with, such as the Jiangyong Nüshu Group on WeChat and the Nüshu Culture Folk Communication Learning House on QQ, were more appropriate to be the observational sites for digital ethnography because they included more active users from diverse social backgrounds such as most of the folk indigenous heritage bearers, heritage custodians from the governments and most of the official transmitters. Table 4 below shows the four digital sites selected for digital ethnographic observation.

Table 4. Selection of Digital Ethnographic Sites

Sites	Participants	Number of Members	Type of Sites
Nüshu Culture Communication Group (in Chinese: 女书文化交流群)	Folk transmitters, learners, amateurs, and scholars.	183 (Data on January 28th, 2019). 189 (Data on April 30th, 2020)	WeChat Platform
Jiangyong Nüshu (in Chinese: 江永女书)	Heritage custodians, official transmitters, scholars, business practitioners with political background. Small number of folk Nüshu participants.	102 (Data on January 28th, 2019). 134 (Data on April 30th, 2020)	WeChat Platform
Nüshu Culture Folk Communication and Learning House (in Chinese: 女书文化民间交流学屋)	Folk transmitters, learners, amateurs, and scholars.	197 (Data on January 28th, 2019). 385 (Data on April 30th, 2020)	QQ Platform
"Nüshu Culture" (in Chinese: 女书文化) WeChat Official Account	Contents: Articles and records about all kind of Nüshu participants.	1500 Followers (Data in January 2019)	WeChat Platform

The focal points of my observation on these selected digital sites mainly included: 1. Interactions, dialogues and social relations among the members. 2. Heritage activities

practiced on these platforms and the participation of the members. 3. Textual materials such as articles published and shared on these platforms. When seeing meaningful and notable phenomena and information, including conversations, debates, articles, pictures and so on. I recorded them on my computer through Microsoft OneNote. I maintained a dedicated online notebook on OneNote for recording and classifying these digital ethnographic data.

It is worth noting that the unselected Nüshu sites were not abandoned, as they also contained useful and constructive data. Therefore, I also browsed these ancillary sites on a regular basis, updated and recorded notable information and brought all the findings (from both the primary and secondary sites) together so as to set up an abundant and multidimensional database of the digital ethnographic observation. Through the observation, the formation, modes of operation, practical activities of the online heritage sites, as well as the differences between different types of sites can be investigated.

3.5.3 Reflection on Digitally Ethnographic Methods in this Research

Compared with traditional ethnography, digital ethnography has noticeable advantages. First is the long period of sustainability. Online ethnographic observation could last for a long time. Using the Internet, researchers can observe their research subjects for years. This study's online ethnographic observation lasted three years on a number of Nüshu online platforms, involving cultural participants of various backgrounds.

Second is economy. Online ethnography does not require researchers to travel to the fieldwork sites and the researchers need not spend a long time (such as years) on a field trip. Therefore, researchers can save considerable costs in transportation, accommodation and other travel fees. This study carried out both online and offline ethnographic fieldwork observations. With the application of years of digital ethnography, the offline fieldwork journey lasted for just few months, which was much

shorter than traditional ethnography observation. Thus, the costs on fieldwork trip could be saved.

Third is data quality. In this study, heritage participants in online groups conveyed more daring and critical voices than those of the offline interviewees. This may be attributable to the anonymity aspect of virtual communities. Participants are given more freedom of expression online. In addition, participants can choose to participate in different online groups according to their preferences, where they can present their opinions under a preferred specific group atmosphere and find member groups on the same wavelength.

Fourth is efficiency. This advantage lies in that the researcher can make contact with the participants (or gatekeepers) through online communities before the researcher's offline fieldwork trip. In this study, the digital ethnographic observation in early 2017 enabled the researcher to approach several Nüshu participants as well as the heritage community in advance and laid a basis for the researcher to carry out a further offline fieldwork trip in 2018.

However, digital ethnography still has some inadequacies. First, the number of sites may be limited. Qualitative digital ethnography requires the researcher to select representative observational sites from all the related sites while the excluded ones could not achieve enough attention. This means that the range of sampling might be restricted. Second, the source of participants may also be confined due to the disparity in the participants' access to digital technology and equipment. Explicitly, participants who are unable to afford or gain access to digital technologies and devices might be overlooked by the researcher in digital ethnography. In this study, the digital ethnography data was principally from the active heritage participants on the online heritage spaces who were relatively young, well-educated and economically well-off. However, there are still a number of heritage participants who seldom appear on social media, such as elderly people, people who were not able to afford or use digital devices

and those who were not interested in using digital social media. The tone of voice and influences of these individuals may be ignored in digital ethnography. In this sense, digital ethnography may limit the scope of reach of the participants.

Given the above problems, this study adopted a mixture of online and offline ethnographic methods. It was decided to conduct a preliminary observation through digital ethnography in the early stage of the research to understand the heritage community and make contact with some respondents. After the preliminary online investigation during 2017–2018, the offline fieldwork was carried out from July to September 2018. The offline activities focused more on the practices of the indigenous community and the groups and individuals who might be ignored in the digital sites, especially the indigenous, ageing participants and some of the participants who rarely appear online. When the offline interview and observation data were about to be saturated, the researcher returned to the UK and continued to pursue the evolution of the heritage field through digital ethnography.

This study obtained adequate data through a series of qualitative methods combining online and offline ethnography. The following sections presents the process of data analysis.

3.6 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for Data Analysis

3.6.1 Why CDA?

This chapter clarifies the principles and procedures of data analysis based on CDA. It demonstrates why CDA is meaningful to the data analysis of this study, how Fairclough and Van Dijk's CDA methods are critically applied in this study, and the procedures to practise CDA's philosophies and methods in this study.

The potential of CDA in this study lies in its rapport with the research purposes and questions. The course of CDA motivates this study to focus on the social power relations in the Nüshu community, concerning the exercises of hegemony,

discrimination and marginalisation of the participants. CDA draws attention to the significance of investigating the ideologies of the participants, which are indicated in ways of acting and interacting and identity formation, and how these factors contribute to Chinese heritage discourse.

Wetherell (2001: 3) believes that 'discourse is the study of language use'. Discourses are forms of expertise collected into different disciplines, which deal with the construction and representation of knowledge; discourses not only reflect social meanings, relations and entities, but also constitute and govern them (Foucault, 1991). Foucault's work was concerned with the epistemological issues of knowledge construction and practice, in particular the power-knowledge relations underlying forms of expertise and the relations of power underpinning dominant discourses. For Foucault, the relationship between power and knowledge was vital; knowledge is identified as a particular technique of power (1991). CDA provides a method that allows the analyst to perform an interlocutory role in the dialogues between texts and social interactions in its oscillations between the close and detailed inspection of texts and an engagement with broader social issues (Fairclough, 2001: 229). Discourse is both reflective of and constitutive of social practices.

CDA, like many other approaches to discourse analysis, is the study of society through investigating language use. Since the 1990s, CDA has rapidly developed into a mature and influential method for language research (Stubbs, 1997). A central concern of CDA is identifying and understanding how people organise themselves and act through particular discourses (Fairclough et al., 2004: 2). CDA offers a theoretical platform and methodological approach that illuminates the links between discourse and practice and the light this can shed on human relationships and social actions and issues. CDA links sociological issues with empirical analysis of language use. Social structure and discourse structure are needed to be combined in analysis (Fairclough et al., 2003). CDA is a well-established interdisciplinary methodology for analysing discourse and

discursive practice and is located within critical social scientific theory and analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

CDA mainly studies 'social power abuse, dominance, and inequality that are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (Van Dijk, 2001: 352). Being critical in discourse analysis refers to the evaluation of structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control in the text. Dominance, social forces, discrimination, organised power and control become accessible in an analytical sense through examinations of the ways in which this index of power is expressed, constituted and legitimised by the use of language (Martin and Wodak, 2003: 6). CDA generally aims to produce critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 7).

3.6.2 CDA Principles of Fairclough and Van Dijk

Among the many available CDA methods, Norman Fairclough's method is most compatible with the purpose of this study. His CDA methodology has been adopted by many heritage research scholars (such as Smith, 2006; Waterton, 2010b). In Fairclough's CDA, the analyst is asked to examine the relation between language use and surroundings. Fairclough (2006: 12–13) claims that, ontologically, social relations have a materiality in that they are socially constructed. Epistemologically, he discards positivist accounts of social and economic facts that exclude their social and discursive construction. Methodologically, he stresses the dialectical character of the relation between different elements of the social, including discourse (ibid). Fairclough's CDA considers both linguistics and critical social theory. From the perspective of linguistics, discourse sometimes is defined as wide range of written or spoken language, while other times defined as different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice (Fairclough 1992: 3). Fairclough (2000: 144–145) mentions that particular practices, sections of society (such as bodies of expertise, areas of policy development,

public employees, community groups and so forth) have particular discourses internalised within them that help them to shape social life and particular behaviours and practices. The impact of this construction of discourse is thus explicitly tied up with notions of power and ideology (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

Fairclough offered several tactics with which researchers could examine discourse. Fairclough's discourse analysis methods highlight analysing texts by considering 'discourse figures in three main ways in social practices: genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together' (Fairclough, 2003: 26). Fairclough (2003: 26) explains that 'genres' refer to ways of acting and interacting through speaking or writing. Analysts can distinguish different genres as different ways of (inter)acting discoursally. Second, Fairclough regards 'discourses' as ways of representing. Fairclough explains that 'representation' is clearly a discoursal matter that may represent the same phenomenon from different perspectives or positions. In that sense, discourse abstractly refers to language or other semiosis and is a concrete, countable noun meaning particular ways of representing parts of the world. Third, 'styles' refers to ways of 'being', which means discourse could reflect behaviour in constituting particular ways of being or particular social or personal identities.

Although Fairclough put forward the above analysis framework, the analysis principles presented by other CDA scholars are also worth noting. Van Dijk's discussion on discourse, power and dominance is also pondered in this study. Van Dijk (1993) encourages researchers to understand the nature of social power and dominance. Van Dijk (1993: 249) emphases 'the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance'. 'Dominance' is defined here as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality (ibid: 249–250). CDA analysts are suggested to take an explicit socio-political stance, focusing on dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise reproduced by text and talk, and on the elites and their discursive strategies for the maintenance of

inequality and legitimate control (Van Dijk, 1993). Van Dijk suggests that CDA is a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality, especially organised and institutionalised dominance, the hierarchy of power in a specific community, as well as the inclusion and exclusion of participants in it (Van Dijk, 1993). For conducting the analysis, analysts need to understand the 'access' and 'control' of power and dominance (Van Dijk, 1993: 254). Here, 'access' refers to actors' privileged 'access' to socially valuable resources (ibid) while 'control' refers to the control of powerful groups over the action and cognition of others (ibid). Further, Van Dijk (1993: 264) presents the factors of CDA analyst structures such as 'argumentation', 'rhetorical figures', and 'lexical style'. In this type of analysis, CDA investigates the lexico-grammatical choices made within texts for a study of the relations between discourse, power and dominance.

3.6.4 CDA in this Research and Procedures

Both Fairclough and Van Dijk's CDA principles influenced the strategies of analysis in this study. This study built an analysis model for its specific purposes.

The three dimensions of analysis, genre, style and discourse, require the researcher to investigate how participants speak or communicate heritage-making, how they represent the heritage field they live in and how they make sense of their social and personal identities through their actions. In other words, this study investigates how heritage participants use language to construct a relationship between context and ideology, and specific heritage social practices that produce such discourse.

Additionally, the factors that Van Dijk emphasised in CDA, such as power, dominance and hegemony, are essential to be explored. The analysis considering these factors focuses on how the power and dominance system in the Nüshu heritage community is constructed through discourse, how power elites play a role in this process, how these discourses bring about hegemony and inequality and finally how marginalised and invisible groups debate on their heritage identity-making. The above presents the basic

rationale of the CDA of this study. The following paragraphs shed light on the CDA procedures in this study.

First of all, the data sources for CDA in this study included all in-depth interview texts, fieldwork records and records from digital ethnography. All the data were textualised or transcribed to build a 300,000-word database. The analysis started with repeated reading of these texts and the distinguishing of the 'emerging discourse' in them. In this process, I initially named several discourse categories that could be examined in the Nüshu heritage community using the database, such as 'official heritage discourse', 'local heritage discourse', 'folk heritage discourse', 'discourse of authenticity', 'commercial heritage discourse' and so on. Different discourse categories involve different actors, behaviour patterns, power and dominance, as well as power conflicts. I further divided these discourses into two categories, namely 'official heritage discourse' and 'folk heritage discourse'. After confirming these two categories of discourse, I investigated how and why particular discourse was formed in particular social conditions. In other words, the analysis puts forward the researcher's own explanations on the formation, operation, characteristics and participants of these two discourses, taking 'discourse' to be a discursive practice and ways of interpretation.

In order to achieve this explanation, I entered the second step of CDA to analyse the discourse strategies of the two discourse categories, especially the strategies that different heritage participants adopted to legitimise and dominate discourse. This was an elaborate analysis process from subtle pragmatical features to broad social aspects. There were various aspects to be considered in this step. For example, the analysis examined who was in the dominant position and who was the subordinate in these two respective discourses, and by what means the dominant cluster achieved their legitimate and hegemonic status. The analysis explains how power struggles have been reflected in the hierarchical power system of this heritage community.

To conduct the analysis, I investigated what language the participants used to argue their legitimacy in the Nüshu heritage community. I scrutinised the rhetorical figures and lexical style their arguments reflected, for example, whether they used rhetorical mechanisms such as allegories, metaphors, similes, idioms and proverbs to construct the meaning of specific statements and their discourse styles. I considered whether their language implied identity differences, such as the use of 'our', 'their', 'other' and analogous terms to fortify the barrier between discourse groups. I also assessed participants' positive or negative attitudes towards specific heritage practices based on their arguments.

After clarifying the symbolic features of language and the attitude the speakers reflected, the next step was to closely link these symbols with environmental factors. This step was to regard discourse as a social practice. Especially based on this step, a series of complex ideological issues can be correlated, such as the participants' social behaviour and identity-making. In order to obtain such connections, it was needed to move from the micro linguistic level to the macro social level to consider what social factors have to do with participants' meaningful language expression. In this study, social factors include global and local heritage strategies, governance mechanisms, economic conditions, social relations and so forth. This step enabled me to examine participants' semantic features by considering social factors and to understand the standing of various discourses. The purpose of this step was to promote the perception of a series of multifaceted, convoluted social issues, relationship issues and identity issues.

In addition, influenced by Van Dijk's CDA principles, I noted that CDA needs to reveal not only how discourse promotes the emergence of dominance, but also the discourses that used to be neglected and invisible (Van Dijk, 1993). Special attention should be paid to the overlooked clusters and their expressions. In this study, the stances of the participants who are peripheral to the heritage governance system, such as the heritage

grassroots and the folk bearers relying on digital representation, were specially focused on.

3.7 Transcription and Thematic Coding

Although CDA led the analysis of this study, the analysis units and the logical connections among the units need to be clarified in order to establish an explanatory system to explain the research questions.

Data processing in this study was divided into three steps. The first step was the transcription of interview data, offline fieldwork data and digital ethnography observation data. The second step, with the application of thematic coding methods, was to generate main themes based on the preliminary analysis of the original data. The main themes generated here could present critical discursive characteristics. Then, a series of subthemes was generated under these main themes through open coding. These subthemes were used to support the arguments in the main themes. The third step was to further streamline the coding collection and determine the coherence among the codes. In this process, the usage of NVivo improved the efficiency of coding. The following sections explain these steps in more detail.

3.7.1 Interview Transcription

My online and offline qualitative interviews were recorded with both a recording pen and a smartphone. I often turned on the recording pen together with the recording device on the phone during each interview in an attempt to prevent data loss due to the failure or malfunction of a device. After each interview, I transferred the files from the recording devices to my laptop, checked the quality of the recording and backed it up in a special encrypted folder.

The interview data were transcribed with the assistance of software. Since my interviewees were all Chinese language users, a Chinese speech-recognition application was used to help complete the transcription of the 25 recordings. The name

of this application was 'iFLYTEK (讯飞听见)', a comprehensive service platform that provides voice-to-text transcription and multilingual translation. This website provides Chinese and English machine transcription services. Users just need to upload audio files to the website, select the transcribed language and pay for their transcription orders, then they can obtain machined-transcribed texts within 15 minutes. The site also offers manual transcription services, but the price is higher. This study chose the machine transcription service to improve work efficiency. The transcription of the 25 recordings only took a few hours.

Ethical issues were reflected in this step. According to the *Service Guarantee Standard*[19] of iFLYTEK, the service provider guarantees the data destructibility, data privacy and data confidentiality of the users. The system will automatically clear the data on the corresponding disk on the physical server so that the data cannot be recovered. The system design has a user authority system; users can only access their own data. The system guarantees data transmission encryption and data storage encryption by using HTTPS, WSS (WebSocket over SSL) protocol and third-party CA to ensure the security of the transmission channel.

However, there was an obvious disadvantage in machine transcription. Specifically, the quality of machine transcription may largely rely on whether the speaker's pronunciation is clear and whether the recording environment is noiseless. If the speaker's pronunciation is in standard Mandarin and clear enough, and the recording is not disturbed by noise, the accuracy rate of machine transcription can reach 95%. Otherwise, the transcription accuracy will decrease accordingly. Such a drawback of machine transcription requires researchers to carefully check and proofread the achieved results.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed texts, each transcript was checked repeatedly along with its recording. In the process of checking, the speaker's tone and

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[19] Service Guarantee Standard of iFLYTEK: https://www.iflyrec.com/html/helpCenter/serviceAssurance.html

emotional attitude were distinguished and recorded. Moreover, many keywords were remarked on and recorded in this process, such as *guanxi* (关系), *tizhi* (体制), authenticity, orthodoxy, monopoly, self-media, cultural brand and so on. The attention to these keywords that signify discourse and power was in connection with the essence of CDA. These keywords, in the next processing stage, became the footing of the thematic coding.

The machine-assisted transcription generated a database of 250,000 (Chinese) words for the analysis. In addition, this study gained data from fieldwork survey including diaries, photos and textual records and data from digital ethnography including records of interactions among participants and textual and visual materials published in the selected digital ethnography sites. These sources generated about 50,000 words of textualised data. In total, 300,000 words of textualised data were acquired for the analysis.

3.7.2 Thematic Coding with NVivo

The analysis and interpretation of this vast number of data brought great challenges. As mentioned above, CDA requires the researcher to examine language use from sematic to social perspectives and investigate the reflections of power in language. Through the repeated examination of the transcripts, several keywords and notable phenomena were discovered. However, there was a lack of logic connections among these findings. Given this, I decided to take advantage of the coding methods in thematic analysis to make the data structure plain.

Thematic analysis is one of the most common analysis methods in qualitative research. It emphasises identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (or themes) within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The focus is to check the thematic or meaning pattern inside the data. This method emphases both organisation and rich description of the data set and theoretically informed interpretation of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding is the primary process for developing themes, involving

identifying items of analytic interest in the data and tagging these with a coding label (Boyatzis, 1998). This method is suitable for many types of qualitative problems; for example, it can investigate the life experiences, opinions, behaviours and practices of participants, the factors and social processes that influence and shape particular phenomena, the explicit and implicit norms and rules governing particular practices and the social construction of meaning and the representation of social objects in particular texts and contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Flexibility is one of the characteristics of this method. Braun and Clarke (2014) suggest that their reflexive approach is equally compatible with social constructionist, poststructuralist and critical approaches to qualitative research. Themes are conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning across data items, underpinned or united by a central concept, which are important to the understanding of a phenomenon and relevant to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Regarding the relationship between the themes and data, themes are as entities that exist fully formed in data while the researcher is simply a passive witness to the themes emerging from the data. The characteristics of thematic analysis and its related coding methods demonstrate its significance to this research. Thematic coding can be employed in this study to build a logical structure from the database, thus developing a critical interpretation of the research questions.

NVivo software was used to accomplish thematic coding. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software. It is designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based and/or multimedia information. The software allows users to classify, sort and arrange information, examine relationships in the data and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching and modelling. After loading the transcribed texts and other textual materials into NVivo, each text was treated as an external document. Three main themes were primarily developed through repeatedly reading and thinking about these texts, namely, 'Heritage Community and Participants (linking the essence of Nüshu heritage community)', 'Nationalisation of Heritage (linking

National Heritage Discourse)' and 'Practices of the Folk Heritage Community (linking Folk Heritage Discourse)'. In NVivo, three nodes were made for the three discourse categories.

After making the three main discourse categories, I continued the repeated examination, comparison and abstraction. The units of analysis in this process were a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph in the transcribed texts. A series of subthemes that reflected coding abstractions were developed in this stage. These subthemes were embodied in the form of nodes. These nodes were then organised into a 'node tree' that was used for forming the structures for data interpretation and the writing of the analysis chapters.

3.7.3 Coherence and Extraction

After obtaining the node tree consisting of the primary and secondary themes, the logical connection between nodes needed to be considered. At this stage, some nodes that were irrelevant to the research questions or lacked sufficient evidence were abandoned. Each retained node should be very meaningful to the research questions and be able to interpret and summarise a number of data. This was a process of constantly refining data and finding logical connections. After this step, the enormous database was condensed into a logical pyramid that mirrored evident and comprehensible meanings. The nodes contained by the condensed 'tree' can effectively explain the subthemes and themes, and finally interpret the research questions. After that, each subtheme was given a fitting name, which was a process of generalisation and abstraction. The structure of this 'tree' as well as the names generated directed the writing of the analysis. In addition, in these applicable nodes, several representative transcripts were extracted and became the examples or cases appearing in the analysis chapters.

In the analysis, CDA and thematic coding were complementary to each other. The purpose was to inaugurate a critical, discursive, logical and thematic analysis and an interpretation structure.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Prior to data collection, the Ethics Committee of University of Leicester approved this project. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form were designed for Ethical Approval (see Appendix). Before each interview, participants were asked to carefully read the Participant Information Sheet and sign the Consent Form. They were informed of the purpose and significance of the study. On the Consent Form, they could make a series of selections according to their preferences; for example, they could choose whether their interviews were recorded and whether their real names would appear in the dissertation, and they were told that they could withdraw from the research at any time. All the acquired data were stored in an encrypted folder in the researcher's personal laptop to ensure the privacy of the data. Participants could ask the researcher to provide transcripts of their interviews. Some participants asked to be given copies of the dissertation after completion.

Specific ethical issues have been considered. The respondents in this study are given a label or a pseudonym to prevent them from being offended or harmed in any way due to the consideration that several participants have put forward critical views on sensitive questions such as current heritage politics and the conflicts between the official heritage community and the folk heritage community.

In addition, ethical issues of digital ethnography have been paid special attention. This study involves four observation sites of digital ethnography and consent from the gatekeepers of each of these sites was acquired. They were informed of the identity and purpose of the researcher. The researcher seldom engaged in the discussions in these digital spaces to maintain the identity of an observer, so as not to influence the direction of any online discussions. Furthermore, members whose words are quoted in the thesis were contacted individually and privately to obtain their consent.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the principles and procedures of data collection and analysis. Qualitative research methods guided the research design. When designing this research, the goal was to obtain abundant data via various ways. Qualitative in-depth interviews and field ethnographic observations were carried out. Through the fieldwork in Nüshu village and Changsha, a multidimensional vision of the Nüshu heritage community was established. Digital ethnography was another important source of data collection. In this process, online observation sites were purposefully selected. Digital ethnographic observation lasted for three years. The observation revealed a constantly constructed and transformed contemporary Nüshu heritage field. The significance of digital ethnography to heritage research is reflected in this chapter. Data analysis was based on a series of criteria and measures in CDA. Appropriate adaptation was made in the application of CDA according to the features of this study. The purpose of analysis was to generate a critical, discursive and logical explanatory structure supported by themes. This chapter also considers the ethical issues of this study. The following chapters present the analysis and findings achieved with the data.

Chapter Four: Chinese Official Heritage Discourse and Identity in ICH: Cool Authentication and Authenticity

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first one presenting the findings. It demonstrates several key findings in terms of the official heritage discourse in Chinese ICH Nüshu as well as the heritage identity issues in the 'cool' authentication of transmitters. This chapter starts with the historical issues relating to Nüshu's authenticity as well as the current disputes surrounding 'stand scripts' as the context. It demonstrates the discourse of heritage authenticity in the name of 'stand scripts' and 'orthodox transmitters' and the linkage of such discourse with China's cool authentication for making national ICH. This chapter illustrates how a series of hierarchical and institutional authentication mechanisms affect the heritagisation of ICH Nüshu and how they make official authenticated transmitters the 'orthodox' heritage identities and exclude non-official, non-authenticated heritage participants.

Given the theoretical framework presented, this analysis is linked with the Foucauldian discussions on 'truth' and discourse (see Foucault, 1980; Fontana and Pasquino, 1991) in which Foucault believes that discourses generate effects of truth, which are in themselves neither true nor false (Foucault, 1980: 116–119). Discourse is power that sets up a particular regime of truth in which certain knowledges become admissible or possible (Armstrong 1983: 10). Given this perspective, the analysis does not aim to prove who represents the 'truth' of Nüshu, who represents the authenticity of Nüshu or who practices the 'standard' Nüshu, but stress that there is no absolute 'true knowledge' in this ICH community and the authenticity debates in heritage are the product of power and discourse.

This analysis reveals what power relationships are hidden behind these authenticity debates and discursive compositions, and how the 'cool authentication' or the 'regime

of heritage authenticity' under the official heritage discourse is established and strengthened through a series of power mechanisms (on the other hand, Chapters Five and Six demonstrate how the 'hot authentication' and the 'regime of heritage authenticity' in the folk heritage discourse is founded and reinforced through the specific power apparatuses of the folk heritage participants). The analysis in this chapter and the next chapters proves that the authenticity and authentication debates under the influence of various social powers do not occur in a single movement from top to bottom. The power from the grassroots is also trying to counterattack the hegemony of the official heritage discourse on heritage authenticity.

4.2 Historical Context of Nüshu's Authenticity Debates

This chapter specifically examines Nüshu participants' actions in the heritage's authenticity interpretation and authentication practice. Su suggests (2018) the authenticity of intangible culture is more likely to be 'subjective'. In contemporary times, a subjective authenticity interpretation of ICH has been reflected in the Nüshu Heritage Community. In other words, different heritage bearers and participants hold unique ways of understanding the Nüshu culture and the different interpretations and the participants negotiate, compete and even conflict with each other in order to assert their position in the authenticity interpretation of the heritage. The cultural practices from the past to the present have affected people's comprehension of Nüshu's authenticity. The comprehension over heritage authenticity always presents distinctive characteristics over time. This section presents the transformation of the Nüshu culture from tradition to modern times, setting the context of the authenticity disputes and debates in the Nüshu heritage community over the past decades. The historical transformation of Nüshu reflects that this culture has never been stagnant; the understanding of authenticity of this culture has transformed with time. The analysis in the following section shows the transformation of the inheritance patterns, writing tools and writing contents of Nüshu, which reflects the social and historical background of the authenticity debates in the Nüshu heritage community.

4.2.1 Inheritance Patterns

This section first demonstrates the transformation of Nüshu's cultural practices in its inheritance patterns. The conventional, accepted manner of Nüshu's inheritance is 'kou chuan xin shou (口传心授)', which means verbal instruction and memorising (He, 2010; He, 2011). In other words, elder women sing or chant while the younger women listen and learn. In the Nüshu areas in the past, women could mostly sing Nüge and recognise Nüshu scripts, but not everyone could write. Women learnt Nüshu from their elder female relatives and friends. A series of conventional festivals and rituals such as 'zuo ge tang (座歌堂, which means sitting in the singing hall)', the 'Bullfight Festival (斗牛节)', and 'Chuiliang Festival (吹凉节)' allowed them to share their Nüshu skills from generation to generation. Xie and Zhao determine ways of Nüshu inheritance in their research. They are 'family-based inheritance, inheritance in privacy lectures, inheritance in worshiping events, and inheritance in the singing hall' (Xie & Zhao, 2008: 24). The traditional ways of transmission were constructed by women and integrated in these women's daily life. There was an absence of specialised Nüshu schools, tutors or textbooks in history. Women's boudoirs were their main venues to exchange Nüshu, hence Nüshu women were called 'lou shang nv (楼上女, which means upstairs women)' in many recorded materials (He, 2011). Men were excluded from these gendered activities. Furthermore, only a few materials are preserved to date due to the custom that Nüshu works should be burned and buried when the woman died, thereby making the culture more mysterious.

These historical inheritance patterns began to be diminished when people outside of the Nüshu community entered. Nüshu's traditional characteristic of 'privacy' has encountered significant challenges since the 1980s when it was discovered by academia and media. Another transformation in Nüshu's tradition lies in the rise of 'male inheritance'. Due to the promotion of Nüshu tourism, local people (men and women, young and old) engaged in Nüshu activities to increase their income, such as making products with Nüshu symbols for sale. A number of male scholars learnt the scripts and

have become Nüshu experts. As such, Nüshu's 'female inheritance' tradition has been completely broken. Thirdly, a woman's Nüshu works today are less likely to be burnt or buried after death. People write Nüshu for entertainment, artistic accomplishment and collection, and their carefully created Nüshu works are more likely to be exhibited and preserved.

4.2.2 Writing Tools

The second transformation in Nüshu's traditional feature is that Nüshu's writing tool is no longer bamboo pens but brushes. According to an interview with Respondent 17 (interview in July 2018), her grandmother wrote Nüshu with stiff bamboo pens rather than brush pens. Respondent 16 (interview in August 2018) also mentioned that women mostly used 'gun zi bi (棍子笔, which means stick pens)' in the past. Brush pens were expensive and mainly used by well-educated men in the past (Liu, 2015: 199). Females were not allowed to undertake education and were less likely to obtain brushes and ink for writing. Consequently, they usually made thin bamboo sticks as their writing tools. However, Nüshu writers today seldom use sticks but prefer brushes. Liu's (2015: 199–200) research reveals that artists, scholars and the authorities have stated that the primitive way of Nüshu writing is stiff and 'lacks a sense of art' and encourage transmitters to write with soft brush pens, just like Chinese calligraphers, to make the scripts look better and improve the 'artistic value', which means the cultural value, aesthetic value and artistic means embodied in artworks. Today, only a few Nüshu Transmitters insist on writing Nüshu with traditional pens, usually when they practice writing in private. However, they still need to write with brushes for completing tasks from heritage governors, usually for political or commercial purposes.

4.2.3 Writing Contents

The third transformation is in Nüshu's literary content. This dimension focuses on the content that Nüshu bearers wish to pass on to the audience and what is expressed by the bearers in Nüshu literary works. Nüshu literary content is used to send consolation

letters and ordinary letters among sworn sisters (19%), autobiographies and biographies (10%), folktales and folksongs, as well as narratives of events (Chiang, 1995: 75). Historically, women could express their innermost thoughts, complain about their pains in life and resist or condemn the mainstream social rules through their literary creations. Women educated themselves in Nüshu to distribute their opinions and discharge their emotions as supressed under ancient China's patriarchal social systems, in which women had to abide by 'the three obediences and four virtues (三从四德)'[20] (see Knapp, 2015). Thus, the script is a romanticised resistant discourse and a tool of women's power (Silber, 1995: 3). Women's power and identity could be reflected in various Nüshu proses. Female figures moulded in Nüshu literature pursue unrestricted love and defy gender inequality and feudal ethics (see Liu, 2010b and Chiang, 1995: 78). Another role of Nüshu literature was to lament women's miseries. In the first half of the 20th century, people in China lived in unceasing wars and chaos and women lost their husbands and children. Given such circumstances, Nüshu became a channel for Jiangyong women to voice their excruciating life experiences, release themselves and communicate with other miserable women. By consoling and inspiring each other, they could adapt their mentality and endure their lives. The Nüshu literature in the past was vivid, touching and distinctly feminine.

However, the literary preferences of Nüshu have been gradually transformed since its rediscovery in the 1980s. Currently, what these officially authenticated transmitters write is frequently directed by the local heritage authorities. Contents that compliment the ruling party and the state have supplanted traditional Nüshu discourses. For

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[20] The Three Obediences and Four Virtues are the most basic set of moral principles and social code of behaviour for maidens and married women in East Asian Confucianism, especially in Ancient and Imperial China. The three obediences for females include 1. being a maiden daughter to her father; 2. being a chaste wife to her husband; and 3. being subordinate to her sons in prioritised order according to the seniority of each, as a widow and in perpetuity, dedicated to clan and family. The Four Feminine Virtues for women are: 1. Feminine Virtue in Ethics in matrimony; 2. Feminine Virtue in Speech in matrimony; 3. Feminine Virtue in Visage in matrimony; and 4. Feminine Virtue in active and ongoing feminine participation in chaste, monogamous, matrimonially-restricted sexual intercourse (Knapp, 2015).

example, a transmitter copied a 198-meter-long, 17,000-word *Chinese Communist Constitution* in Nüshu and dedicated it to the Chinese Communist Party. The Nüshu version of the *Charter of the United Nations: Preface, Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* and *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* were copied by the transmitters and gifted to the UN and the UN Women. Nüshu has been widely used as a political or propaganda apparatus on national and international stages. Transmitters are less likely to write letters with their sworn sisters, lamenting words or autobiographies, but instead undertake political, diplomatic or commercial tasks assigned by the heritage authorities. Fortunately, this study found that a few folk Nüshu bearers could write in the genres they were interested in and share their creations with other participants through folk Nüshu social media platforms.

Nüshu culture has experienced noticeable historical transformations; it is still transforming in various aspects such as modes of inheritance, writing practices and literary contents, which has resulted in problems in the interpretation of its authenticity. Nüshu's past and present have shown great differences. Due to the lack of chronological resources, many problems in Nüshu, such as its scripts, customs and rituals, are still controversial.

4.2.4 What are 'Standard Scripts'?

Against the above historical background, the contemporary Nüshu community is experiencing a debate about "who can represent the 'authentic' and 'standard' Nüshu scripts." The discussion in this section demonstrates the negotiation and conflict process on heritage authenticity within the Nüshu ICH community in China.

> 'Now we are preparing the Nüshu Painting and Calligraphy Competition. A problem still has not been solved. It is the problem (of) whose Nüshu scripts could be the **standard** scripts for the participants to use. The Jiangyong County leaders recommended that the Nüshu scripts written by the (officially authenticated) Nüshu Transmitters are standard.

I asked one of Jiangyong's leaders, "There are six Nüshu Transmitters, whose scripts should I adopt?"

The leader said, "Each of theirs are right".

Then, I asked three Nüshu Transmitters to write a same sentence in Nüshu, but they wrote differently.

I asked the leader again, "Who is the standard?"

The leader answered again, "Each of theirs are right".

I'm now completely confused'

(Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 6, August 2018).

'The local governments asked one of the (officially-authenticated) transmitters to write a Nüshu work to the United Nations. I looked at it. I can be sure that two scripts are correct and four are wrong'

(Folk Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 11, July 2018).

The above interview data reflect the current disputes on the 'standardisation' of the Nüshu scripts. The correct use and interpretation of Nüshu scripts has been a long-term debate and negotiation by the participants. Given the linguistic nature of the Nüshu scripts, Nüshu is a phonetic script based on the local dialect in the Jiangyong area. Phonetic script refers to a system of writing with a direct correspondence between symbols and sounds. The inheritance of phonetic scripts relies heavily on sound. Nüshu is a script that records the Jiangyong dialect. In Nüshu's language system, each syllable represents a set of homonyms. Two or more words may share the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins. According to Zhao Liming's study, the number of scripts used by Nüshu users historically was about 600, including some 'variants' (Zhao, 1995: 87). A variant Nüshu script refers to a script that is synonymous and homophonous with the most commonly used one. If the 'variants' are not included, Nüshu has only about 300 basic characters. These hundreds of characters 'can basically record the Jiangyong local dialect completely' (Zhao, 1995: 87).

On the other hand, although there are some 'basic scripts', the Nüshu language system is still evolving for the reason that the Jiangyong dialect today is likely to be different from the dialect hundreds of years ago when Nüshu was founded. Nüshu's pronunciation changes throughout the historical evolution of dialect speech. The differences in dialect pronunciation directly cause the different characters written by Nüshu learners. In other words, if a person's Jiangyong dialect speaking is different from that of another person, even if they both master the basic Nüshu scripts, the Nüshu they write may be different. Similarly, if the scripts written by several Nüshu users are consistent, it may be due to the consistency of their dialect pronunciation. This feature made the spread of Nüshu rely deeply on the user's mastery of the Jiangyong dialect. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, females in the Jiangyong area could receive the official school education with Mandarin as the teaching language. Their proficiency in using Jiangyong dialect has predictably decreased, which intensifies the inconsistency in their script use.

A series of historical factors have caused fierce debates on the authenticity of Nüshu scripts. Heritage officials, bearers, scholars and experts are all involved in such debates. In this community, heritage participants question each other's authenticity. From the view of the local authorities, it is believed that the scripts written by the Nüshu Transmitters they authenticate are decisively accurate even if consistency in script writing has not yet been obtained among them. However, the folk group dissent from regarding the officially authenticated transmitters as the only narrators and presenters of Nüshu's authenticity and crediting their scripts as the standard and paradigm (interview data from Respondents 13, 14 during July–August, 2018). When a Nüshu bearer presents his/her Nüshu works (especially online), distrust or doubts in terms of the validity and appropriateness of their scripts are highly likely to be aroused by the other participants. Then, the community will, once again, fall into the endless debate on the scripts' authenticity.

In this case, the local authorities recommend Nüshu Transmitters and bearers to learn and use the 392 Nüshu scripts confirmed by Nüshu scholar Zhao Liming that have achieved the ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) certificate as the standard. However, the folk group hold different opinions on this standard. Some folk bearers, especially the local bearers, demonstrated their preference and recognition of the Nüshu scripts collected by Zhou Shuoyi in his *Nüshu Dictionary* as their standard (Respondent 4, July 2018) (the identity of Zhou Shuoyi and his significance in the folk Nüshu community has been discussed in Chapter One). The reason for their recognition lies in that Zhou speaks the same local dialect as the indigenous transmitters. Therefore, compared with the outside scholars, Zhou's Nüshu expression is considered much closer to the indigenous, local heritage bearers. However, due to the lack of academic status and social capital, Zhou's Nüshu *Dictionary* was criticised by several institutional scholars and stigmatised as 'making fake Nüshu' (see Zhao, 2014; Jen, 2004; Xie, 2003). Some of the cultural elites and political elites in the Nüshu field, given their platforms in academic publication and mainstream media, have occupied most of the visible space for explaining the authenticity of Nüshu scripts and cultural practices. In other words, the justification for 'standard' Nüshu scripts and 'authentic' Nüshu customs has been largely manipulated by a few political or cultural elites in the heritage field. As Liu (2014) states, the problem is that any academic research (or news coverage) inevitably results in publication, and Nüshu bearers have actually lost control of the scripts. Some transmitters feel uncomfortable with the 'exotic gaze' cast by readers of the 'imagined community' created through the enterprise of publication (Liu, 2017: 242–243). Such publication actually diminished the expression of heritage.

Currently, heritage authorities, folk heritage communities and heritage scholars still hold different views on what is the 'standard' or 'appropriate' Nüshu. An atmosphere of mutual distrust fills this heritage community. The mutual exclusions of others' knowledge of authenticity inevitably exerts a negative impact on the preservation and inheritance of the heritage. These long-standing mutual exclusions are probably the

major reason for the stagnation of the research and development of the heritage in recent years. The analysis argues that the reason why the local heritage authorities are able to manipulate the interpretation of the authenticity of ICH is due to a series of authentication empowerments from the state to the local levels. In China, a series of authentication procedures have been officially confirmed, and some ICH projects and transmitters have been selected and authenticated and even been given hierarchical status, assisting the local heritage authorities in occupying an advantageous position in this enduring authenticity disputation by virtue of their executive and legislative powers.

4.3 Hierarchical 'Cool' Authentication and Hierarchical Identity

In the course of the debate on the authenticity of Nüshu in the past two decades, the official heritage discourse and the folk heritage discourse have intertwined, negotiated and even conflicted. Especially since the 2000s, a series of laws and regulations and official documents on Chinese ICH have been promulgated, allowing the official heritage discourse to further dominate the Nüshu ICH field. The analysis links ICH authenticity debates, 'cool' authentication and identity-making, focusing on how these elements interact with each other and influence the ICH. It also investigates what kind of conflicts about authentic heritage knowledge and identity appear under this system. This analysis is based on a series of ethnographic data and explores how China's official heritage discourse is strengthened through the formation of the 'Four-Level ICH System'.

4.3.1 Four-Level Heritage Institutions: Empowerment from Nation to County

In 2004, China formally joined UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In order to fulfil the obligation to accede to the Convention and further strengthen the protection of China's ICH, China issued *Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in March 2005. The document emphasises the importance

and urgency of the protection of China's ICH, and sets guiding goals and principles for the protection. Article Two, the 'Work Principle', emphasises the principle of 'government-led, social participation, and clear responsibilities' in China's ICH protection. It clarifies the central role of the governments in the protection of China's ICH.

In this document, the most notable development is the Chinese authorities' request to 'establish a system of representative intangible cultural heritage lists' and gradually form an ICH protection system with Chinese characteristics. The establishment of the national-level ICH list is considered to be a necessary measure for China to fulfil the obligations to the Convention as one of the State Parties on the requirement of the Convention that 'each contracting party should draw up an ICH list according to its own national conditions'.

China's ICH practices reflect a localised innovation of China's ICH protection model. China's national cultural departments have established a four-level ICH system for representative lists covering the 'nation-province-city-county' levels. At the national level, it has authenticated four batches, ten categories and a total of 1,372 national-level ICH projects. Under this four-level system, national-level ICH projects are approved and announced by the State Council. Provincial, municipal and county-level ICH projects are approved, authenticated and announced by the same level of government (State Council, 2005b). For the ICH projects listed at different levels, methods, such as granting names, awarding titles, commendations and rewards, giving funds and supports, can be adopted to encourage the transmitters to carry out transmission activities (ibid). These methods are believed to be the effective mechanisms for ICH protection and inheritance.

The empowerment of the heritage governance to the local authorities from the national cultural departments is achieved through a series of heritage laws and regulations. Article 4 in the *Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural*

Heritage in China requires cultural departments at all levels to 'strengthen leadership, implement responsibilities, and establish a coordinated and effective working mechanism' (State Council, 2005b). This requires governments at all levels to play a leading role in heritage protection. The regulation requires local governments at all levels to hold the leadership role in the regional ICH projects, put the protection of regional ICH on the important work agenda of the region, incorporate it into the overall planning of the local economic and social development of the region and incorporate it into the regional cultural development outline (Article 6 in China Intangible Cultural Heritage Law, 2011). The national documents encourage the cultural departments at the lower levels to strengthen the construction of the ICH laws and regulations at the regional level, and efficiently formulate relevant policies and measures for the protection and development of the local heritage. The national rules and regulations for the authentication and management of heritage projects and transmitters have become an important basis for the lower-level governments to carry out heritage governance activities.

A series of provincial, municipal and county-level heritage governance policies have been promulgated following the national policies in China. In September 2005, the general office of Hunan Provincial People's government issued the provincial-level *Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The document was proposed to establish an ICH protection system as well as a system of ICH representative lists in Hunan Province, covering all the cities and counties in the province. In this process, Hunan provincial ICH representative lists are approved by the provincial people's government and reported to the State Council. The ICH projects of different cities and counties in the province shall be approved and published by the governments at the same level and reported to the superior governments for recording.

At the municipal and county level, Yongzhou Municipal People's government in the Hunan Province issued the *Yongzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Measures* in 2014, which is the most important official document related to intangible

cultural heritage in this region. This municipal ICH document is based on the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law* of the PRC, while its formulation is also considered the specific charge of the regional cultural heritage. The cultural administrative departments at the municipal and county levels are responsible for establishing the representative ICH lists at their respective levels, collecting and protecting the outstanding ICH projects in their respective administrative areas. The municipal- and county-level cultural administrative departments are authorised to formulate protection plans to protect the representative ICH projects in their jurisdictions. This study, by comparing different levels of heritage documents, finds that a series of clauses in the regional documents are directly copied from the national or provincial ICH laws and regulations by simply changing the 'state' and 'province' in the upper-level documents to 'city' and 'county' in the regional documents. It is argued that the adaptation of the lower-level governments to China's national heritage policies is likely to be mechanical and duplicative, because in China's authoritative heritage system, obedience is always the core value for lower-level institutions.

At present, China is implementing a hierarchical ICH protection system. The vast majority of provinces, cities and counties in China have established their own representative ICH lists. A four-level (nation-province-city-county) ICH protection system has been formed. The establishment of such a four-level system is regarded by the Chinese heritage authorities as the most important measure for China's ICH protection. There is no doubt that the establishment of this system plays a significant role in recording, filing, preserving, transmitting and disseminating China's intangible heritage. A series of traditional cultures, which are on the verge of extinction due to the impact of the process of industrialisation and modernisation, has achieved rebirth with the support of policies and funds from this system.

This study argues that a noticeable feature of China's heritage system is its top-down hierarchy. Under this system, China's cultural heritage projects are divided into various levels from low to high according to their impact on and importance to Chinese culture

and society under an authoritative and authorised official heritage discourse. Furthermore, different 'levels' of heritage projects are given different 'levels' of protection rules, resulting in different political and economic support. In the official heritage discourse of China, the establishment of various levels of ICH lists and the authentication of projects are to concentrate limited resources on the protection of the projects with great historical, cultural, artistic and scientific value. These 'valuable' ICH heritages with sufficient support are more likely to obtain renaissance, or their extermination could be suspended, while the heritages that are considered to be insignificant are likely to evaporate with the passage of time in modern Chinese history.

Intangible cultural heritages are 'living' cultural forms with transmitters' practical activities as the main carriers. Under the authoritative, hierarchical heritage system constructed by the official cultural sectors, China not only distinguishes the high or low of tens of thousands of ICH projects, but also distinguishes different levels of ICH transmitters as representatives. This issue is discussed in detail in the next section.

4.3.2 Making Heritage Identity: Discourse of 'Representative Transmitters' in China

The authentication procedures and the related concepts of 'Representative Transmitters' are refined in the *Interim Measures for the Identification and Management of Representative Transmitters of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects* issued by China's Ministry of Culture in 2008. In terms of definition, 'Representative Transmitters' refer to the transmitters who are authenticated by the cultural administrative departments at various levels and undertake the responsibilities of inheriting and protecting ICH items at different levels. These people are regarded as the transmitters who have certain representativeness, authority and influence in specific heritage communities. In China, the authentication of the Representative Transmitters needs to go through the following procedures: declaration, verification, review, publicity and approval. In these procedures, the cultural administrative departments at

different levels and the 'panel of judges' composed of heritage experts play a commanding role. Their knowledge (probably non-local and non-indigenous knowledge) determines which heritage bearers are assigned at the top of the official heritage system, who is placed at the low end and who is abandoned due to the limited numbers and insufficient official resources.

Under China's four-level ICH management system, the representative transmitters have been divided into four levels: national transmitters, provincial transmitters, municipal transmitters and county transmitters. According to official statistics, there are 3,068 national ICH transmitters in China (data from *Ihchina.cn*, accessed on 3 January 2021). The number of transmitters at provincial, municipal and county levels increases level by level. Taking Hunan as an example, as of December 2018, there were 121 national ICH transmitters (Wang, 2018). It is difficult to accurately count the ICH items and representative transmitters at the municipal and county levels due to the large numbers.

Individuals who are officially authenticated as the representative ICH transmitters receive certain economic and/or political support from the cultural administrative departments. For example, the cultural departments need to support transmitters in carrying out cultural heritage education and training, provide activity venues for transmitters, support transmitters in collecting and publishing ICH materials, and provide transmitters with platforms to display their heritage skills. For the representative transmitters who have limited sources of income and difficulties in their livelihood, the local cultural administrative departments need to provide financial aid to ensure their basic living needs. At present, China's cultural departments at all levels provide special funds to their authenticated representative transmitters.

China's authentication of representative ICH transmitters reflects the empowerment of cultural capital (Martin and Szelenyi, 1987; Dubin, 1987; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Gouldner, 1979) to some individuals from Chinese heritage authorities. Cultural capital refers to the courses and knowledge that a person can obtain in elite institutions (Persell

and Cookson, 1985). The heritage authentication of certain people 'symbolises' these people's 'mastery of certain practices'. The title of 'representative transmitters' artificially determines transmitters' ability to culturally perform social practices in a specific cultural context. Being given such official authenticated titles means the ability to participate in high-level cultural activities and is a symbol of the interest of a particular class in China's hierarchical heritage context. Bourdieu suggests the institutionalised state of cultural capital 'confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital with is presumed to guarantee' (Bourdieu, 2002: 282). The formal recognition of a transmitter's heritage ability, such as qualifications or skill certificates, can be regarded as a kind of institutionalised culture capital in China's heritage institution.

This form of cultural capital in heritage is 'closely related to the labour market and can be transformed into economic capital' (Bourdieu, 2002: 282). This aspect is reflected in the representative transmitters with different levels of institutional cultural capital being able to obtain different levels of material subsidies. Nüshu, as a national ICH project, has representative transmitters from the national level to county level. Transmitters at different levels are granted different heritage identities as their honours and certifications. The subsidies received by transmitters vary hierarchically. The national-level Nüshu transmitter (one person) can get 20,000 RMB (nearly 3,000 US dollars) per year, the provincial-level Nüshu transmitter (one person) can get 10,000 RMB (nearly 1,500 dollars) per year, the municipal-level Nüshu transmitter (three people) can get 3,000 RMB (nearly 460 US dollars) per year and the county-level Nüshu transmitter (two people) can only get 2,000 RMB (nearly 300 US dollars) per year (interview with Respondent 16, August, 2018). From these statistics, the national transmitter can get 10 times as much funding as the county transmitters.

The above two sections clarify how cool authentication occurs in China's ICH field and the Nüshu field. The agents manipulating the cool authentication in Chinese heritage are a series of institutions empowered by the state's administrative and

legislative power. They designed and organised a series of formal standards and procedures such as declaration, certification and accreditation (Cohen and Cohen, 2021) so that some ICH projects and heritage bearers could be accepted as the representative projects and transmitters. In Chinese ICH, the basic questions in terms of ICH authenticity and authentication do not lie in whether an object or place is authentic, nor whether a heritage bearer or a narrative about ICH is authentic, but is about 'who has the authority to authenticate' and such questions are 'a matter of power' (Bruner, 2005: 150). In Chinese ICH, the power of authentication is not only given to some heritage experts but dominated by the cultural authorities at all levels. Under China's four-level ICH protection system, cultural authorities at different levels have an unshakable hegemony over ICH projects and inheritors in their different levels of jurisdiction areas. China's ICH is facing the risk of authoritative manipulation.

In the next section, based on the observation of the hierarchy of the Nüshu heritage community, some factors that affect the internal hierarchy in the community within the four-level ICH protection system are further explained. The following analysis shows how different levels of transmitters are manipulated by various institutional factors and how their heritage identity affects their heritage practices and attitudes, especially those related to ICH inheritance.

4.3.3 Internal Hierarchies

The data in this section come from field surveys in China in 2018. This part is concerned with how the internal hierarchy behaves in this heritage community, not only considering China's four-level ICH protection system but also a series of Chinese institutional concepts. This section analyses the heritage governance institution *tizhi* in the Chinese context, and how heritage participants inside and outside the institution are treated differently. This section makes visible some transmitters who are marginalised by the institution and analyses their encounters, difficulties and changes in attitudes towards inheritance under the marginalisation.

'*Tizhi*' As Heritage Institutionalisation

> 'I think that because of my "***tizhinei*** (体制内, which means inside the institution)" identity, leaders believed that I was more suitable to complete the (diplomatic) task, while the other transmitters were not suitable enough (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 16, August 2018)'.

The word *tizhi* (体制) in Chinese, translated as 'system' or 'institution' in English, is discussed in this study as it was frequently mentioned by the respondents during the interviews. A Nüshu transmitter pointed out that her *tizhinei* (which means inside the *tizhi* institution) identity brought her extra opportunities than others to take part in national and international cultural occasions, in particular the events with political, diplomatic purposes. Several narratives relevant to the term led me to explore the connection between the term and heritage identity, as well as other relevant terms such *bianzhi*, *hetonggong* and so on in the following sections. I will address what the meaning of the term *tizhi* in China is and how such a term influences the heritage practices of the participants.

Tizhi in the Chinese context refers to the organisational system of state organs, enterprises and *shiye danwei* (事业单位, which means public institutions). *Tizhi* refers to being a part of the dominant positions in the national organisational system. The *tizhi* system has inside and outside distinctions, namely, *tizhinei* (体制内, inside the *tizhi* system) and *tizhiwai* (体制外, outside the *tizhi* system). The most typical *tizhinei* group is one of three types. The first is government agencies, such as civil servants at all levels of government (Ang, 2012). The second type refers to a series of public institutions called *shiye danwei* in Chinese, including government-funded non-profit organisations and public service units such as public schools, hospitals, research institutions and so on (Tao-Chiu and Perry, 2001). The third type of *tizhinei* group refers to some state-owned enterprises (Li and Gao, 2011).

These *tizhinei* institutional components form the core of the governance system in China and occupy the public sectors from the local to the central level (Brødsgaard,

2002). The *tizhinei* regime in China demonstrates that the existing party-state can be transformed from top to bottom and that the development of civil society depends to some extent on the tacit consent of the party in power (Li, 2015). They are dissimilar from the individual, private enterprises (Li and Gao, 2011). Conversely, the *tizhiwai* (which is outside the *tizhi* system) includes a wide range of private companies that often sign non-permanent contracts with the employees. This model normally does not affiliate with any agencies in national public sectors (Li, 2013). In China, the *tizhi* system is a combination of management organisations and governance paradigms that reflects hierarchical relationships and division of power.

An official from the cultural sectors of the Jiangyong county government stated in the interview that 'the Nüshu Museum is a cultural unit of marketing operation under the management of the Jiangyong County Tourism Development Centre (江永县旅游发展中心)' (Local Heritage Custodian, Respondent 1, August 2018). In recent years, Jiangyong has put a series of institutional reforms into operation. The sector in charge of the Nüshu Museum, currently, is the Tourism Development Service Centre of the Jiangyong County Bureau of Culture, Tourism, Radio, Television and Sports (江永县文旅广体局). The Nüshu Museum is 'a government-led, socially-involved, market-oriented institution' (Local Heritage Custodian, Respondent 1, August 2018). In other words, the Nüshu Museum is governed by the government but is market-oriented. Such an institution encompasses both *tizhinei* (inside system) and *tizhiwai* (outside system) attributes. In the personnel management of the museum, just a few workers were *tizhinei* employees who are permanent formal employees with *bianzhi*. Most of the employees were *tizhiwai* employees, who call themselves *hetonggong*, which means non-permanent, informal personnel (the concepts of *hetonggong* and *bianzhi* are elaborated in the following paragraphs). In addition, two employees in the museum were officially authenticated Nüshu Transmitters, while the others were the heritage bearers who were skilful in Nüshu but not authenticated. The discrepancies in career

identity have resulted in economic, political and cultural inequalities among the heritage participants.

'Bianzhi' and 'Hetonggong' Identities

> 'I entered the "*bianzhi*" system, becoming a formal employee of Nüshu Cultural Management Centre in 2015. Before that, I was a "*hetonggong*" (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 16, August 2018).

> 'We (*hetonggong* in the museum) are just like the normal migrant workers in the society. If the contract expires, we can choose to continue or leave it as you like. There is only one formal permanent worker in the museum. She is different'. (Nüshu Practitioner, Respondent 4, July 2018)

Bianzhi (编制) refers to the established posts in a national-based unit, office or organisation (Brødsgaard, 2002); the authorised personnel in a Party or government administrative organ, a public institution or a state-owned enterprise (Ang, 2012; Burns, 2003). By controlling the *bianzhi*, the state exercises control over the state administrative apparatus, from the top to the bottom. Burns (2003) suggests that the nation continues to maintain control over the *bianzhi* system because of its importance for party patronage and social stability. Furthermore, *bianzhi* is closely linked to the concept of *tizhi*. *Tizhi* generally refers to the system of the national organisation while *bianzhi* means the permeant and stable positions within the *tizhi* system. People who are inside the *tizhi* system are likely to possess a *bianzhi* identity in a particular state-based organ.

The study finds that the transmitter inside the *tizhi*, with the *bianzhi* identity, showed a stronger sense of belonging to the institutionalised heritage governance system and a sense of security and acquisition to her heritage identity.

> 'I entered the *tizhi* system through a series of assessments by the local government, such as written examinations and face-to-face interviews. There were two reasons of including me in the *tizhi* system: first, the leaders wanted me to stay in the museum; second, they have seen my efforts and contributions for the inheritance of Nüshu in the recent years. But you know, the number of *bianzhi* is limited in a unit. ... My income

is a higher after I became a *bianzhi* personnel. Emotionally, I feel much more stable. ... Now, I get it and I believe I will stay in the museum with peace of mind and work and live steadily in the village.' (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 16, August 2018)

The data find that this *bianzhi* transmitter presented the most resolute mentality of transmitting this culture as a lifelong career of all the official transmitters. The *bianzhi* transmitter's peace of mind and self-possession came from her sense of belonging to the *tizhi* system. Compared with the other transmitters, the *bianzhi* transmitter was more likely to be trusted by the heritage authorities and assigned to participate in high-end, official and diplomatic cultural activities. When the heritage authorities would consider candidates to participate in activities for the nationalisation and globalisation of the Nüshu culture, the *bianzhi* transmitter was more likely to be their first choice. It seems that a heritage participant's opportunity to take part in cultural activities, particularly those of political or diplomatic intentions, is less determined by the participant's cultural ability and more by their position in the institutional heritage system.

Among all the official Nüshu Transmitters, only one of them (Respondent 16) owned the *bianzhi* identity. With this identity, the transmitter occupied a rare and advantageous status in this social-cultural field. The transformation of her identity from *hetonggong* (non-permanent contract worker) to *bianzhi* implies the conversion of her identity from a grassroots worker to a stakeholder of a state organ. It also means an upgrade in her political, social and economic capital. With a heritage identity within the institutional system, a series of socio-political resources are tilted towards this unique participant to perform her Nüshu cultural practices on a number of elite platforms. Such an identity change shows how a heritage participant transforms from an ordinary bearer to a heritage elite with certain political identity and background.

'We are "***hetonggong***"; we renew the contract once every two years at which time you can choose to leave or stay as you like'. (Nüshu Practitioner, Respondent 4, July 2018)

Another concept, *hetonggong* (合同工), mentioned by several respondents, is translated as 'contract worker'. It is not a formal permanent employee of the company or organ they are working for (Zhang, 2018; White, 1987) and is usually interpreted as workers recruited by state-owned enterprises and public institutions through signing short-term contracts with a third-party agency (Chen and Zeng, 2012). After signing the contract, *hetonggong* employees are usually dispatched to a particular project and they are asked to renew the contract with the third-party company every few years (Chen and Zeng, 2012). One of the key differences between the *bianzhi* and *hetonggong* personnel is whether their positions inside the *tizhi* system are permeant or not. There are also other distinctions between them such as the income, promotional opportunities and a series of welfare.

Hetonggong workers are the majority in the Nüshu Museum. A *hetonggong* has to renew her contract with a third-party agency once every two years (interview with Respondent 4 in August 2018). This shows that being a *hetonggong* is still not stable employment. Compared with the *bianzhi* worker, *hetonggong* status means that they have limited channels for career promotion and are given inferior political, economic and social status. Such a disadvantageous position and a sense of identity inequality result in a certain degree of insecurity towards their inferior heritage identity.

On the other hand, the *bianzhi* identity is regarded as an 'amulet' to one who works inside the *tizhi* system and is a manifestation of whether a member is really affiliated with an institutional organisation. This study finds that the heritage participants with *bianzhi* in Nüshu were more likely to show gratification in their heritage identity and were more willing to inherit heritage as their lifelong occupation.

This study finds that the Chinese *tizhi* system has an evident effect on the 'heritagisation' of the Nüshu heritage, especially the transmitters' identity-making. It is a system that further determines the identity and status of the transmitters who have already been officially authenticated by different levels of cultural authorities and a few

institutional heritage practitioners who work for the heritage authorities. It is believed that the *tizhi* system has made the 'hierarchical' Chinese heritage governance system more complicated and tiered. In other words, under a 'four-level' hierarchical heritage system, there is another 'institutional' hierarchical system, which undoubtedly intensifies the power conflicts in terms of heritage identity and heritage practice in the community.

Institutional Marginalisation and Inheritance Crisis

In addition to the more visible transmitters who are within the *tizhi*, this research finds that some transmitters are facing a marginalisation and inheritance crisis. They are the official authenticated Nüshu Transmitters but with a peasant identity. In the early 2000s, they achieved the authorised title of Nüshu Transmitter, owing to their proficiency in Nüshu's heritage knowledge and the heritage practices naturally transmitted from their family. Most of them were issued a county-level title of the 'Representative ICH Transmitter in China' usually called by the official and local authorities 'Nüshu Transmitter' (in Chinese: 女书传人). However, as time went by, some of them were gradually excluded and marginalised from the local heritage governance system due to a series of factors that will be outlined in this section. Social-cultural exclusion and marginalisation resulted in their severe uncertainties about their heritage identity. Inspired by the ideas in CDA and CHS, this section makes these people visible and perceptible and seeks to comprehend their heritage identity-making and the identity crisis they are coping with.

> 'During the upgrade process, the government said that I do not have enough materials. What does it mean that I do not have enough materials? (The truth is) you cannot get awarded no matter how many materials you possess. It relies totally on the *fenpei* (分配, which means artificial distribution)'. (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 20, August 2018)

Respondent 20 was a peasant Nüshu Transmitter whose Nüshu knowledge was transmitted in a traditional manner from her antecedent female generations. She was

authenticated as a county-level Nüshu Transmitter by the local heritage authorities in 2010. Since then, she could get a monthly subsidy of 200 yuan (about 30 dollars) for encouraging transmission. She previously relied on smallholder farming to make a living and was supported by her offspring. Years ago, when she was applying to upgrade her level of Nüshu Transmitter from the county level to the municipal level, her application was out of consideration by the local heritage authorities. In the case that only a limited quantity of candidates can be selected to achieve the upgrade, the county government is more likely to allocate the opportunities to the candidates who stand closer to the local heritage governance system, including the transmitters who work for the *tizhi* system or those who have certain social connections with the system. The data presented by Respondent 4 reveal that when authenticating the official transmitters, the applicants who are 'near' the *tizhi* system may easily approach the decision makers in the local heritage authorities, obtain acknowledgements from them before the formal assessment and receive internal messages. The decision makers can somehow guarantee a position for the applicant in the new batch of official authenticated heritage transmitters.

Another participant, Respondent 21, is worthy of discussion in the dispute of local heritage identity-making. Respondent 21 is a county-level Nüshu Transmitter with a peasant identity. A small piece of paddy field is her family's main source of income. To make a living, she works as a cleaner for the Nüshu Museum to earn extra income. It is difficult to imagine that when tourists are visiting the Nüshu Museum and listening to the passionate introduction from the instructors who are Nüshu Transmitters, the cleaner working around is also an officially authenticated Nüshu Transmitter. As a peasant Nüshu Transmitter, it is difficult for her to make a living with her Nüshu talents and the 200 RMB (30 dollars) subsidy per month dispensed from the heritage authorities. She was realistic and more likely to undertake her identity as an ordinary Chinese peasant. She stressed in the interview that she did not care much about the title as a Nüshu Transmitter given by the local heritage authorities. Some of the transmitters

indicated their indifferent attitude to their authenticated identity, demonstrating an identity crisis of heritage.

> I do not care about the title. I am the same as Respondent 20. I do not care about whether you (the local heritage authorities) give me the title or not or what grade is it. For me, this title is dispensable. A lot of people live at my home when they come to the village to explore the Nüshu culture, but I would never tell them my identity as a transmitter unless they find it by themselves. I do not want to tell others about this. I have no expectations and no opinions about the culture. The government want to control, then let them do it'. (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 21, August 2018)

> I stopped writing and singing (Nüshu) since a few years ago. Because I felt so sad and heart broken. I could not see my achievements being recognised. My achievements have turned to their contributions. When the officials of the county cultural departments came to interview me, I usually replied to them directly that I, such as a low-level transmitter, should not be interviewed, because you have other advanced transmitters. Frankly speaking, the government is 'drinking water' but has forgotten the person who 'dug the well for them.' It is completely unfair to me. However, I am too old. I am a farmer. I am useless. I cannot do anything. I have no power to oppose. I have no power to voice. So, I do not participate in any activities now. No hope, the inheritance of Nüshu has no hope. (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 20, August 2018)

The data disclose that these participants who are marginalised from the *tizhi* system are frustrated with their heritage identity and have even decided to conceal or refuse to recognise their authenticated heritage identity in their lives. Due to their dissatisfactions with their inequal treatments in heritage, they have lost their enthusiasm in heritage transmission. They showed their indifference to the inheritance of the culture and a loss of confidence in the culture's future; thus, some of them have ceased their Nüshu heritage practices. Even the officially authenticated transmitters have little power to voice thoughts on heritage under the domination of the local heritage authorities. It seems that these individuals were clear about their marginalised situation and finally decided to stop speaking against the decision-making of the heritage.

The findings demonstrate that several authenticated heritage transmitters who are side-lined from the official heritage system are suffering a heritage identity crisis. To be more specific, their crisis mainly lies in the uncertainties and confusions in which their sense of identity becomes self-doubting due to a change in their expected aims or roles in the heritage field. Their identity crisis has had an adverse impact on heritage transmission. One of the impacts is that some authenticated transmitters have lost their attentiveness and willingness in the heritage inheritance. Despite them being the ones who are experienced and talented in all kinds of Nüshu practices such as writing the scripts, singing traditional Nüshu songs and composing Nüshu verses, they were not placed at an advantageous or predominant position in the heritage field when practising heritage in the context of heritage institutionalisation.

4.3.4 Identities and Obligations

> 'I felt that I become not so free after getting *bianzhi*. I always need to report to the leaders and get approved before I go out (for cultural activities) even during the non-working time. They require to find me at any time, they need to know where I go. ..., I can't go to some activities invited by the folk Nüshu society'. (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 16, August 2018)

> 'Although we are Nüshu Transmitters, we are not allowed to go outside, we can only stay here (Nüshu Museum). ... We only promote it in Jiangyong, such a small range. People outside know little about us. ... I am looking forward to my retirement because I will be free to go out and promote Nüshu'. (Official Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 17, July 2018)

This section discusses the connection between authenticated heritage identities and obligations. Some authenticated transmitters who are in the heritage governance system can attain certain official resources and platforms, but they have to perceive the protocol and obligations that come with these resources (Vanhonacker, 2004). According to the requirements of the local heritage authorities, Nüshu Transmitters are encouraged to participate in officially authorised or authenticated cultural activities but are not always permitted to take part in the activities held by the folk heritage society.

Some authenticated transmitters may be placed under the pressure of reporting to her superiors about her movements and getting approval for going out. In other words, the cultural activities that the transmitter can attend or not are determined by her leaders in the local heritage authorities. To a certain degree, these authenticated transmitters have to sacrifice their autonomy in articulating, communicating and arbitrating heritage and the authorities are dominating transmitters' heritage practices through meddling in a few Representative Transmitters' participation in public activities. Such restrictions are in effect until they resign the museum or get retired.

> 'Because of the official monopoly on these transmitters, it is almost impossible for you to see any Nüshu Transmitters in any cultural activities carried out by the folk society. For example, there was a Nüshu painting and calligraphy exhibition held by a folk organisation in another province last year. Many people, in the folk Nüshu society, participated in it. However, this was a Nüshu activity with no (officially authenticated) Nüshu Transmitters. None of them was allowed (by the authorities) to participate, because this event was not approved and backed by the Jiangyong Local Government. Finally, this event became a self-entertainment of the folk Nüshu learners and amateurs'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, 2018)

Some heritage participants suggest that such a restriction lethally obstructs the exchange and spread of the ICH. The folk society regards such restriction as a 'self-close' (in Chinese: 自我封闭) of the authenticated Nüshu Transmitters group. The data reveal that it is still problematic to link the official and the folk transmitters through folk cultural activities. The current state is that there is a fracture between these two groups, and the fracture is getting larger.

The above sections show what the 'cool' authentication of heritage is like in China and in the ICH Nüshu community. The analysis also demonstrates the social-cultural impacts of the cool heritage authentication on the heritage transmitters, how their identity-making is constructed and what obligations and identity crises they are dealing with. This analysis argues that China's cool authentication of heritage reflects obvious hierarchical and authoritative features and is influenced by not only the heritage

authorities such as the cultural management department from the national level to the county level but also the special Chinese *tizhi* personnel system, which has made the cool authentication of heritage more complicated and hierarchical. It argues that the individuals who are the participants in cool authentication have been lost in the confusions about the making of, competition for and autonomy of heritage identity. Only a few individuals felt satisfied with their heritage identity; most individuals were in a heritage identity crisis, feeling unfairly treated, unconfident and distrustful. Inheriting culture and making heritage identity are in maladjustment in the cool authentication of heritage.

Moving away from the concern about the social-cultural impact of cool authentication on the officially authenticated heritage group, the next section focuses on the impact of the cool authentication of heritage on the unofficial community, especially the stigma crisis of the heritage identity of the unofficial, folk, indigenous participants.

4.3.5. Discourse of 'Orthodox' and 'Unorthodox'

> 'Nüshu Transmitter is the honorary title of government management and needs to be approved by the County People's Government after fixed procedures. So far only eight people have been awarded the honorary title Nüshu Transmitter by the governments. ... Three people have been awarded Nüshu Culture Promotion Ambassador. ... The others are not the **cultural orthodoxy** (文化正统) of Jiangyong Nüshu. It is hoped that the majority of Nüshu amateurs can clearly identify and beware of being fooled'. (*Proclamation of the Jiangyong County People's Government on Maintaining Nüshu's Intellectual Property Rights*, August 2015)

Guided by the national, provincial and municipal documents in ICH Representative Items and ICH Representative Transmitters, the Jiangyong County government has carried out a series of actions accordingly. The county government confirmed the selection of Nüshu Transmitters (also called Nüshu Representative Transmitters in some literature) by officially organised assessment in 2010. Participants were examined for their Nüshu skills in writing scripts, singing Nüge (in Chinese: 女歌, literally: Nüshu songs), doing handcrafts with Nüshu cultural symbols such as

embroidery and creating narrative poems with Nüshu scripts. After the assessment, eight transmitters were selected and divided into national, provincial, municipal and county levels. According to the *Proclamation* (2015), 'Nüshu Transmitter' is an honorary title of government management of the original ecological heritage and needs to be granted through fixed assessment procedures of the Jiangyong County People's Government. A few years later, a *Proclamation of the Jiangyong County People's Government on Maintaining Nüshu's Intellectual Property Rights* (in Chinese: 江永县人民政府关于维护女书知识产权的公告) (Jiangyong County People's Government, 2015) was put forward to legitimate such identities.

The local heritage authorities put forward an argument about 'the orthodoxy of Nüshu culture'. In the West, this term 'orthodox' usually reflects a religious meaning, which adheres to an accepted or traditional belief, for example, the Christian faith as expressed in the early Christian ecumenical creeds. This term also refers to the authorised rules and beliefs or something that is commonly accepted, customary or traditional. In the Chinese context, orthodox (正统) means the legitimate inheritance of parties, schools, religions or the inheritance system of dynasties. In the Nüshu field, or the heritage field, the term 'orthodox', which is frequently mentioned by the officials of the local heritage authorities, is more inclined to the meaning of legitimate inheritance and cultural authenticity. The local heritage authorities proclaimed the orthodox status of a series of Representative Transmitters authenticated by them, asserting that their Transmitters are the 'legal heirs' of Nüshu who can rationalise the authenticity of the heritage. Other titles claimed by the non-official individuals in the folk society are the 'illegal heirs', whose interpretation of Nüshu knowledge is ineffective or irrational.

The analysis reflects the connections between Chinese cool authentication, the discourse of cultural 'orthodox' and the issues relating authenticity disputes. The individuals who are 'coolly' authenticated are usually granted a formal certificate by different levels of cultural authorities. These identities are likely to be developed into

the so-called 'legitimate' and 'orthodox' heritage identities, and bearers with such identities actually have a certain degree of political, economic and cultural privileges in the heritage field. In contrast, those who have not passed the cool authentication will be regarded as having no 'legitimate' or 'orthodox' identity when carrying out heritage practices. The hierarchy of identities in heritage projects not only intensifies the competitions in ICH projects, but also intensifies the authenticity debates between the authenticated and the non-authenticated groups.

> 'People who inherit Nüshu culture have been divided into various classifications. Those who have no (official) titles become fake Nüshu transmitters, while those with titles are authentic. This causes the public's confusion in their recognition of the Nüshu culture. The inheritance of the Nüshu language which was generated from the folk society is now tied to several so-called transmitters. A group of officials who know nothing about Nüshu treat these titles as official titles and authorise them to him and her. It is ridiculous. Before people spread Nüshu, it is a must to be differentiated and identified. The interpersonal relationship and tranquillity in the Nüshu circle have been disturbed invisibly. The name of 'Nüshu Transmitter' should be recognised by the public based on their spontaneous recognition. Nüshu comes from the folk and will always belong to the folk'.

(Digital Ethnography Data, Respondent 10, 2018)

The data above indicate how the folk Nüshu bearers refuted the local heritage authorities' orthodox discourse, which has artificially differentiated and attributed the bearers' level of thought and materiality. The discourse mirrors evident hierarchical characteristics, making the inheritance of heritage delimited to the satisfaction of the 'legal responsibilities' of a small group of 'coolly' authenticated individuals.

The fallouts of the orthodox discourse in heritage involve: first, the public's misperception of the authenticity of the heritage. The public may find it problematic to differentiate the facts or faults in Nüshu scripts and practices and to define whose cultural behaviours and achievements are worthy of respect. Second, the interpersonal relationship within the community has already been disrupted by the hierarchical order.

In other words, Nüshu's function of interactive, emotional communication is in danger of being obsolesced. Pursuing a superior heritage identity might become a covert ambition of the participants. This heritage community is becoming a hierarchical forest.

In the old Nüshu community, female Nüshu users shared an equal, communicative, emotional discursive space. However, the hierarchical rules and the differentiation of orthodox and unorthodox in the community is contrary to its traditional values of equivalence and collaboration. The community today is in a state of puzzlement, which is a condition of uncertainty about what participants should do and what Nüshu means, creating a disorderly jumble. Symbolic violence in the name of heritage orthodox and unorthodox is committed by the cool authentication of heritage in the Nüshu community: 'the dominant class exercises symbolic violence, such as the power, to impose meanings as legitimate...' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 4)

> 'they continue to control these exchanges, … through all the institutions which are designed to favour legitimate exchanges and exclude illegitimate ones by producing occasions, places and practices which bring together, … individuals as homogenous as possible in all the pertinent respects in terms of the existence and persistence of the group'. (Bourdieu, 2002: 287)

This study argues that Chinese heritage's cool authentication has been used to both unify and exclude people. It is believed that in the Nüshu ICH field, 'there is a legitimate and dominated culture because the value judgment on cultural preferences and behaviours has binary opposite characteristics' (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 157), such as vulgar or distinguished, high or low, etc. (Bourdieu, 1984: 482). That is to say, the Nüshu heritage can be regarded as legitimate or not at the same time. Only those with official authentications are considered legitimate and 'recognised' heritage participants. The ruling class of heritage constitutes the so-called 'legitimate culture', which has become the 'dominant culture' (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 157) in the heritage community.

4.4 Cool Authentication and Heritage Industry Making

Then, why do local heritage authorities implement a series of administrative measures to ensure their legitimate, dominant or even monopolistic position in the cultural heritage community? This section puts forward possible answers to this question by relating heritage cool authentication and cultural industry development. This section demonstrates that the local heritage authorities strengthen the concepts of official authentication and official heritage identity and promulgate its 'orthodox theory' not only for building an authoritative local official heritage discourse, but to claim their ownership and property rights of the local heritage resources, thereby monopolising related heritage resources and developing local cultural industries and heritage tourism.

4.4.1 Ownership and Property Rights

> 'The Jiangyong County Nüshu Culture Research and Management Centre has applied for Nüshu-related trademarks from the State Administration of Industry and Commerce for the protection of Nüshu's intellectual property rights. Nüshu-related commercial activities without government authorisation are regarded as infringements. Jiangyong County Governments reserve the right to take legal actions against individuals and organisations for infringements. ... We seriously demand that individuals and organisations who maliciously infringe on Nüshu's intellectual property rights immediately stop the infringements'.
>
> (*Proclamation of the Jiangyong County People's Government on Maintaining Nüshu's Intellectual Property Rights*, August 2015)
>
> 'We registered 15 types of trademarks to protect Nüshu's intellectual property rights. Last year (2017) we also submitted applications for Nüshu trademark registration in seven countries and regions. If we do not register trademarks internationally and domestically, they will be squatted by others. As a result, Nüshu's intellectual property will not belong to us'. (Local Heritage Custodian, Respondent 1, August 2019)

In 2015, based on China's national rules and laws in intellectual property and patent protection, the Jiangyong County Government issued the *Proclamation of the Jiangyong County People's Government on Maintaining Nüshu's Intellectual Property Rights*. The *Proclamation* asserts the status and measures of Jiangyong County

Government in Nüshu's intellectual property protection. The *Proclamation* points out that the Nüshu Culture Research and Management Centre is the only organisation authorised by the Jiangyong County Government to manage the rescue, protection and industrial construction of Nüshu, and has the power to claim Nüshu's intellectual property rights. Such power of ownership is strengthened because it has also obtained a series of trademarks relating to Nüshu cultural industries from the State Administration for Industry and Commerce.

Tang (2013) suggests property rights in heritage can be divided into many domains, such as the right of management, the right of earnings and ownership and so on. The 'rights of property' that the local heritage authorities asserted are their rights in possessing, exploiting, employing and arranging Nüshu's heritage resources. In addition, the term 'intellectual property' used by the local heritage authorities in this *Proclamation* refers to an intangible property that is the result of cultural creativity. The local heritage authorities claim their ownership of the heritage resources through the provisions about intellectual property in this *Proclamation*.

The *Proclamation* demonstrates that Nüshu-related business practices that have not been authorised by the authorities are infringements, and the authorities reserve their rights to take legal actions to deal with any infringers. In other words, any groups or individuals who intend to engage in Nüshu's commercial activities must first obtain an authorisation from the local authorities, otherwise their actions will be considered infringements. Infringement is the action of breaking the terms of laws, agreements and so on and implies a kind of violation, an action of limiting or undermining something. The use of this term reflects the fact that the Jiangyong County Government deems the activities of the unauthorised groups and individuals as illegal and infringing on and destroying Nüshu culture.

At the end of the *Proclamation*, the heritage authorities 'seriously demand' that individuals and organisations who 'maliciously violate' Nüshu intellectual property

rights immediately stop their infringements. On the other hand, individuals and organisations who participate in Nüshu's cultural protection and industrial construction premising the official authorisations are 'warmly welcomed' by the local authorities. The word selections of 'seriously demand' and 'warmly welcome' stand at opposite poles, reflecting the local authorities' diametrically divergent attitudes to the authenticated and unauthenticated groups. The unauthenticated group in the official discourse are 'malicious', whose declaration on the ownership of Nüshu is regarded as an unlawful intention to spoil the heritage authorities. Achieving an 'official authorisation' from the local heritage authorities has become a 'premise' for any heritage participants before starting any enterprises relating to Nüshu or even organising any cultural activities involving the authenticated heritage transmitters. The officially approved 'right' to engage in Nüshu industry development means people who are authorised by the authorities are given a moral or legal entitlement to carry out activities (especially commercial activities) utilising Nüshu's cultural resources. Such 'warmly welcomed' and confirmed entitlements by the authorised scheme inherently contain a privilege or special treatment in the heritage community. The property rights in the Chinese heritage governance system have been discussed by heritage scholars (Lin and Lian, 2018; Tang, 2013). This study demonstrates that in the local heritage governance in Nüshu, the authorities actually play the role of the resources occupier, manager and supervisor, rather than the protector of the interests of heritage participants. Their awareness of the property rights of heritage is intertwined with local administrative forces.

This section argues that by claiming property rights, the official heritage discourse in Nüshu may have been extended by the local heritage authorities from the political dimension to the political-economic dimension. Local heritage authorities are implementing a form of 'cultural appropriation' (Ziff and Rao, 1997) by utilising and occupying the Nüshu heritage resources. Their administrative and legislative powers are intertextualised with China's national heritage laws and regulations and laws of

property rights, thereby controlling the intellectual property rights of the local heritage. This is a despoliation and brutal occupation of the interests of the folk heritage community. The heritage is likely to be transformed and reconstructed for economic or industrial purposes and the long-standing community value system replaced by a consumer value system (George, 2004: 333). Even though there are many copyright-related laws that protect academia and entertainers, there are few laws that protect the cultural resources of indigenous communities (George, 2010). The indigenous community has almost no control over the cultural appropriation, cultural transformation and reconstruction.

4.4.2 Cultural Industry

> 'In the past few years, we have made a lot of efforts to publicise Nüshu. Thus, Nüshu has achieved certain publicity effects in the international arena. ... But the development of our Nüshu industry has not yet made money. We also have not received more support from the superior governments'. (Local Heritage Custodian, Respondent 1, August 2018)

> 'We should take advantage of the uniqueness of Nüshu to build a 'Nüshu Island', a destination for exploring and investigating the female culture. Nüshu is a cultural phenomenon and a female lifestyle that can be packaged into a '**Culture IP**'. A female-specific traveling destination can be planned, and the derivatives of Nüshu culture and the Nüshu cultural industry can be developed'

> (*Hunan Daily*'s Interview with Jiangyong County CPPCC Chairman, Ms. Liu Zhonghua, July 7th, 2018, *Hunan Daily*. Available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2018-07-07/doc-ihexfcvk9771200.shtml)

The Jiangyong County Government proposed a *Jiangyong County Nüshu Cultural Industry Construction Framework* (江永县女书文化产业构建框架) (Liu, Z.，2018), which attempts to integrate the resources, technology and capital advantages of the governments, experts, scholars and enterprises to jointly create the 'Nüshu Cultural Brand' and realise the mutual protection of cultural heritage and industrial development to promote and explore a feasible way to transform the 'cultural power' into 'productivity' and a new model for county economic development. The worldwide

trademark registration mentioned in the previous section is also a vital constituent of this heritage brand building.

The term 'Culture IP' is used by the local heritage official. 'IP' means Intellectual Property', which is a concept in law. In the Internet age in China, IP has become a commonly used term in the cultural creative industry that means a cultural brand that can be developed in multiple dimensions with certain economic and social influence. To be more specific, an IP can be presented in various cultural forms, such as a literary work, games, movies, anime and so on. Owners of the IP can earn market profits through selling the authorisation of the IP or selling IP derivatives. In this research, the local heritage officials reveal that the local authorities have obtained Nüshu trademarks worldwide as the basis of occupying the ownership of Nüshu culture for the development of the Nüshu culture IP. The purpose is to build an officially dominated Nüshu industry, achieve the marketisation and commercialisation of the heritage and receive more policy and financial supports from the superior authorities. The gains from these projects can revitalise the rural economy and help heritage communities eliminate poverty.

These assumptions and plans by the heritage authorities seem to be reasonable and benevolent. The once decaying Nüshu Village has been completely renewed through decades of tourist investment and infrastructure construction. The village environment has been significantly improved (as shown in Chapter One). Villagers can set up stalls in the village and earn extra income by selling goods, drinks and food to tourists. However, the official monopoly of heritage resources through heritage trademarks and brands has exerted a negative impact on folk heritage participants.

> 'The term "Jiangyong Nüshu" has been registered as a trademark by the local governments. As you see, the officially authenticated Nüshu Transmitters often write these four words in public. They (local heritage authorities) also want to sell the right of using this trademark to earn some money. The folks were asked not to use the term "Jiangyong

Nüshu" as the "label" in their Nüshu activities'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, September 2018)

'The governments feel that Nüshu is a good way to make money, so they have made a lot of rules and regulations to constrain this "money-making tool". They want to control it in their own hands. However, Nüshu is not a patent that some individuals and institutions can "imprison or confine" to make money'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 10, August 2018)

As mentioned before, one of the premises to take part in the development of the cultural heritage industry is to obtain an authorisation from the local heritage authorities so that the participants are allowed to employ the intellectual property in the name of 'Jiangyong Nüshu' for commercial purposes. From the point of view of the folk Nüshu bearers, the local authorities have placed the heritage in 'captivity (被圈养)' by enacting 'rules and frames (条条框框)' (Respondent 10, August 2018), making Nüshu a patent controlled by them. These rules and frames are constituted by not only various local announcements, regulations and specialised regulatory agencies for heritage governance, but also national heritage provisions that underlie or support the heritage governance scheme of the local heritage authorities. The folk heritage community is witnessing Nüshu being imprisoned and confined by the authoritative organisations. The organisations, using patents, acquire the sole right to exclude others from constructing, exploiting or marketing the inventions of Nüshu. They can also more easily achieve visibility and recognition on the market and generate profits than the un-authorised participants.

This section argues that the purpose of the declaration on property rights of the heritage authorities is to achieve a dominant position in the development of the cultural heritage industry. As heritage has become a resource and an emerging channel for gaining local benefits, the authorities who are supposed to act as a regulator of the cultural market have joined the competition of market interests, whose competitors are private, unauthorised/unauthenticated heritage practitioners.

The above data demonstrate that in the Nüshu heritage community, the dispute about 'who owns the past' between the heritage authorities and the folk indigenous community has always existed. The dispute is intensified through competitions in trademark registration, intellectual property declaration and cultural industry development. The data also demonstrate that local heritage authorities have become the 'owner of traditional local heritage' (Baillie et al, 2010) who are continuing to bolster the commercialisation and industrialisation of local heritage and 'invent' a series of administrative methods to pronounce the cultural characteristics of themselves and their authenticated participants. In this process, folk indigenous participants are deprived of the right to explain and practice their past. Daher (1999) points out that it is not advisable to move towards capital accumulation in the name of heritage protection and that heritage practices cannot be simply restricted in the commercialisation process of a specific historical and cultural environment. If heritage-related industries have been a major component of the national/regional economy, there should be a dynamic and balanced interaction between heritage projects, heritage communities and industry investments. Heritage protection and industry development should be activities that promote cultural continuity and development and the participation of the heritage community.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter mainly addresses the questions of how the disputes surrounding heritage authentication and authenticity manifest the heritage discourse governed by the state power and how the official discourse and identities obtain their 'legitimacy' in heritage through the use of language. This chapter argues that there is an official heritage discourse in China and in the ICH Nüshu community with hierarchical, authoritative political-economic oriented features. The discourse is constructed and reinforced through a series of 'cool' authentication mechanisms within a 'four-level' hierarchical heritage management system from national to county levels, along with the special Chinese *tizhi* institution, which defines different official personnel identities. This

study reveals the making of different levels of identities in heritage by the cool authenticating procedures of the Chinese heritage authorities and puts forward the issues relating to identity and obligations, marginalisation and identity crises.

This chapter demonstrates that the reinforcement of the official heritage discourse and its series of cool authenticating procedures has intensified the authenticity debates in the heritage community between the official, authenticated side and the non-official, unauthenticated folk side. A discourse of 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' is formed by the heritage authorities based on the Chinese cool authentication power in heritage, exerting an oppression of surviving space and stigmatisation of heritage knowledge and identity of the folk heritage community. This finding indicates that the implementation of China's authorised heritage discourse at the local level is approaching a local heritage authoritarianism whose purpose is not only to monopolise the local cool authentication of transmitters and the interpretation of heritage authenticity, but also the ownership and property of the local heritage, in order to play the leading role in heritage industry development.

In such conditions, do the folk heritage participants have any recourse to show their resistance so as to make the folk group visible in heritage protection, inheritance, practices and decision-making? These issues are addressed in the next chapter. The next chapter focuses on, in the context of the current digital age, the authentication, identity-making and discourse construction of the folk heritage group, as well as their perception of heritage authenticity.

Chapter Five: Digitalisation of Heritage Practices

The 'folk heritage discourse' and the identity-making of folk heritage participants, as the substantial side of the official heritage discourse and official heritage identities discussed in the previous chapter, are another focus this study investigates. The analysis links heritage discourse with digital social media platforms in China for the reason that more and more heritage participants have transformed their knowledge sharing and inheritance activities from traditional media offline to online media spaces, especially social media groups.

According to the *Digital 2020 China Report* by We Are Social[21], mobile phones are a central part of Chinese life today. Among China's 1.44 billion people, there are 1.66 billion mobile phone connections, which means a 112% penetration rate. Since April last year, the number of active social media users has increased by 1.5%, which means that 72% of the population, or 1.04 billion people, have become active users of social media. Chinese social media users are among the most active in the world. In the past month, 98% of Internet users have accessed or used social media platforms. People in China have an average of 9.3 social media accounts. Further, 89% actively use social media or contribute to it.

Given the context of the Digital Age and social media boom in China, this chapter investigates how Chinese folk heritage participants achieve their heritage discourse on digital platforms and how they build and assert their heritage identity within this discourse. Investigating the interactions relating to Nüshu heritage practices among various stakeholders on these platforms will allow us to view and hear the scenes and words of heritage from the 'bottom'.

To achieve a better understanding of heritage democratisation as well as its relevance to social media factors, this chapter investigates literature about heritage communities

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[21] We Are Social: Digital 2020 China. Available from https://wearesocial.cn/digital-2020-china/

and practices on digital platforms, revealing the influence of new media on heritage-making. It highlights the growing significance of social media mechanisms for the voice of the marginalised, excluded heritage communities and participants to obtain their heritage democratisation. The next section draws on the notion of heritage democratisation, considering the social impacts of digital platforms and social media.

5.1 Cultural Heritage in Digital Age and Democratisation

The Digital Age, also known as the Information Age, Computer Age or New Media Age, is a historical period beginning in the late 20th century in which many things are done by computer and large amounts of information are available because of computer technology (Castells, 1996). With the coming of the Digital Age, more and more data are stored digitally and become replicable. The products of the digital age, such as laptops, smartphones and tablets, allow people to receive a variety of data and information at any time and in any place. The efficiency of data dissemination has greatly improved, and the methods of dissemination are constantly evolving. The Digital Age has greatly transformed people's lifestyles.

The impact of digital technology on heritage discourse and practice is significant, as new digital technologies alter and transform the complex set of social practices that interweave memories, material traces and performative enactments to give meaning and significance in the present to the lived realities of our past (Giaccardi, 2012: 5). The term 'new heritage' (Kalay et al., 2008) means that the production and reproduction of cultural heritage are in the shift between analogue and digital media.

Heritage researchers have considered the changes in heritage practices in the Digital Age and the wide-ranging impact of digital technologies on heritage. Heritage research has been experiencing a digital shift during which digital technology, social media and a series of relevant ideas and notions are connected with heritage. Today, both tangible and intangible heritages such as oral memory, food and indigenous traditions have been transformed into digital forms with the efforts of national and international

programmes (Bachi et al, 2014). Digital technologies have been extensively applied to digitise ethnographic materials, transforming them into audio or video forms, appropriate metadata and related documentations. The products built from digital resources have helped heritage participants and non-participants to keep aware of the research, learning, management and cultural tourism of specific heritages (Economou, 2016).

The widespread use of digital technology, especially social media, in heritage practice has brought significant social impacts that cannot be ignored. The following discussion demonstrates some of these influences from the perspectives of participation, vitality, hegemonic deconstruction and heritage democracy. It also presents how this study considers these dimensions.

5.1.1 Digitalisation and Heritage Participation

Heritage participation based on digital technology and social media is usually achieved by the formation of virtual social networks. Coombe and Herman (2004: 571) point out that the owners of heritage contents can act as social media users to create culturally influential social networks. Based on these networks, they achieve a self-regulation of culture and a new digital culture paradigm. Active audience engagement in heritage practices though social media is an approach to renew the connections between audiences' everyday lives and matters of heritage and to create unique moments of dialogue and interactions inside the exhibition space (Iversen and Smith, 2012). Gaitan (2014) focuses on the close connections between social media and cultural institutions in the Information Age. It is believed that social media not only enables the spread of cultural heritage, but also bridges the distance between users, the public and heritage institutions (Liew, 2014). These networks enable interactions among the audience and enhance the connections between the audience and heritage subjects, thereby drawing the audience's attention to the diversity of cultural heritage (Brown and Nicholas, 2012).

Cultural heritage may gain more social influence and visibility in cyberspace. Through digitisation, cultural heritage can be opened to the mass public (Bachi et al, 2014; Ciolfi, 2012). Users can access heritage contents and reach heritage audiences through digital devices (Economou and Meintani, 2011), which demonstrates the flexibility of gaining heritage knowledge and participants in the Digital Age (Ciurea, Zamfiroiu and Grosu 2014).

The Flow Associates and Collections Trust (FA and CT) has proposed that it is a challenge in the process of heritage digitalisation for ethnic communities to become owners, maintainers, nurturers and interpreters of the heritage, as the digitalised heritage can be widely read by the public at the same time (FA and CT, 2010: 14). Giaccardi (2012) believes the participatory culture fostered by social media changes people's experience and ideas about heritage, particularly outside the institutional domain. In many ways, social networking is achieving the goals of knowledge sharing, retention and discussion that institutional databases are still struggling to achieve (Brown and Nicholas, 2012: 316). A variety of information technologies enable users to participate spontaneously and continuously in the collection, preservation and interpretation of digital heritage contents (Giaccardi, 2012). Economou (2016) highlights that the involvement of heritage communities is crucial in the process of the digital reinterpretation of heritage, while digital measures provide them with enhanced means.

The trend that can be affirmed is that amateurs as well as professionals are increasingly embracing social media places to strategically and discursively negotiate issues of authenticity, trust and power (Waterton, 2010a) and stakeholders from different communities and audiences in the revitalisation of heritage can get involved (Stuedahl and Mörtberg, 2012). Scholars believe that the creative uses of new media can sustain this compound social system by being an impetus and stimulus for enhancing heritage practices, meanings and values (Giaccardi, Champion and Kalay, 2008: 195–196). The widespread use of digital technologies has brought heritage into a participatory age, in

which process social media plays an important role in the maintaining of various 'living heritage systems' (Liu, 2010: 2976). Even though the value of personal posts on blogs or social media is trivial, these contents collectively constitute a unique record of contemporary society and can collect discussions and ideas from the mass public. If these contents can be preserved, they will become an important source of knowledge for future generations (UNESCO, 2016: 4).

However, there are still some challenges that heritages are facing in the digital age. Brown and Nicholas (2012: 307) argue that the expressions of traditional knowledge and culture are usually not protected by the rules and laws of copyrights and patents. Additionally, if there is a lack of professional knowledge, technology and guidance, the gaps between different heritage participants may be further exacerbated (Taylor and Gibson, 2017; Worcman, 2002); a digital divide still affects accessibility to both devices and systems of networking for those marginalised in any economic or political system (Brown and Nicholas, 2012: 309). Bachi et al (2014) suggest that official backups are required in terms of both technology and copyright.

5.1.2 Deconstruction of Heritage Hegemony

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) argue that, in the past, political authorities could and did invent histories that justify their authority. Smith's (2006) Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) has identified a dominant narrative created by national and elite entities that works to exclude non-expert views about the nature and meaning of heritage through emphasis of aesthetics, monumentalities and magnificent narratives. However, the advent of digital technologies has made heritage more polyvocal and less dependent on heritage elites (Witcomb, 2007). In the digital age, the highly specialised area of cultural heritage is becoming more user-friendly and accessible to the general public, rather than being reserved to a few professionals, and cultural heritage is less and less elitist (Bachi et al, 2014; Gaitan, 2014). People are given a channel to create networked meanings to form their own contexts (van Oost, 2012). Silberman and

Purser (2012: 13–14) suggest that the role of heritage curators and conservators in the coming years will become increasingly that of facilitators rather than authoritative scripters and arbiters of authenticity and significance.

Silberman and Purser (2012: 13) argue that the value of cultural heritage in the Digital Age lies in its power to stimulate 'ever-evolving community-based' reflection and conversation on past, present and future identities. Shaw and Krug (2013) investigate how young people use digital technology and social media to enable informal online cultural learning, and the impact of this kind of virtual interaction on their cultural/ethnic identity-making. Heritage is increasingly reconfigured as what a community values and speaks out to others about in relation to their identity (Giaccardi, 2011).

In a context of greater mobility, the use of digital media by local communities has been encouraged to interpret their own places and practices (Economou, 2016). The indigenous people can provide strong incentives for creative expression and active participation (Jenkins, 2009: 7). Social media and its participatory culture have reshaped the relationship between the audience and heritage institutions, which have promoted the understanding of heritage practices of the grassroot, while the boundaries between the official and unofficial heritage discourses are questioned (Giaccardi, 2012). Further, Brown and Nicholas (2012) have analysed some digitally based case studies and found that indigenous people have started to assume their rightful place as the producers and keepers of their own knowledge.

5.1.3 Developing Heritage Democratisation

Decades ago, it was predicted that the increased access to digital surrogates in heritage collections would have 'a significant democratising effect' (Besser, 1997: 118). Brown and Nicholas (2012: 308) claim that the connection between digital technology and democracy is growing through the impact of 'open access' and 'freedom of information' upon the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of indigenous peoples in democratic

societies. In many societies, digital culture is seen as a tool of freedom of expression and information, which promotes the development of transparent and responsible socio-political systems. There are a number of developments within social media that have provided spaces for a larger number of voices, appearing to offer 'a more open and democratic attitude to heritage' (Economou, 2016: 222). Taylor and Gibson (2017), through focusing on the process of democratising the grassroot heritage of the Zuni community, argue that through digitisation, heritage communities are given the right to share and add knowledge to their own digital storage, which reflects a bottom-up approach of handling heritage. Scholars (Richardson, 2014; Taylor and Gibson, 2017) further suggest considering the scale at which democratic principles are applied in heritage, as well as more criticism.

Research gaps can be found in that there is a lack of research on the performance of social media-based heritage democratisation in the Chinese context. This study addresses this research gap by investigating how digital tools and social media are applied in the heritage practices of Nüshu participants, and to what extent such applications reflect the characteristics and possibilities of heritage democratisation in this field.

5.2 Transformation of Media for Inheritance

In the Nüshu field, traditional communication methods have gradually been replaced by digital tools with the rapid development of the Internet in recent years in China. Social media has now become an important medium for Nüshu's dissemination and inheritance, which has affected Nüshu's contemporary history. Nüshu's media tools have transformed from oral and textual means to electronic and digital means throughout different historical stages. Four Nüshu dissemination and transmission approaches are analysed in this section. They are traditional oral instruction, official training schools, academic communication, websites for cultural heritage and museums.

The analysis draws on the status quo of each method and its significance to heritage communication and transmission, as well as its limitations and recessions in contemporary heritage practices. The analysis demonstrates that social development has brought about new media models and the shortcomings of traditional media for cultural inheritance and communication have become increasingly apparent while the significance of social media as a medium is increasingly prominent in recent years.

5.2.1 Traditional Oral Instruction to Training School

The communication and inheritance of Nüshu historically was highly reliant on the oral instructions from elderly Nüshu bearers and the memorisation of the learners. Such a way of heritage communication was limited to a specific area and relied on family and social interactions. After Nüshu was rediscovered by scholars in the 1980s, the local governments began to encourage a 'teaching and learning' mode of heritage inheritance, in which learners gain Nüshu knowledge and skills through training courses in the 'Nüshu Classroom (女书学堂)' from the senior bearers, who transmitted Nüshu from their elderly female generations. This 'Nüshu Classroom' is located in the Nüshu Museum. In the classroom there is a teacher's desk, a blackboard, as well as nearly ten double desks and chairs, which can serve twenty to thirty students. The statue in the centre of the classroom is the 'Gupo Goddess (姑婆女神)', which symbolises the faith of the women in this area in ancient times. The county governments provide free Nüshu courses for the public almost every year. Students are recruited nationwide and even worldwide. They are taught Nüshu's history and customs, reading and writing the scripts, singing Nüge and understanding the special artistic value of the heritage and its social-cultural significance.

The fees of these courses are paid by the local governments; the students only need to bear the expenses of transportation, food and accommodation. Free courses are undoubtedly attractive to Nüshu enthusiasts across the country. There is no threshold for this training; any enthusiasts are welcome to participate, which to a certain extent

has broadened the scope of Nüshu exchange. All training courses are taught by the elderly, indigenous Nüshu transmitters to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of heritage knowledge. A transmitter can directly teach up to 30 students in one course, which reflects an effective transmission model. The Nüshu Classroom indeed has attracted a large number of students to gain Nüshu knowledge and has contributed to the maintenance and transmission of the culture.

Figure 8.   Nüshu Classroom (photograph taken by the author in August 2018)

The official heritage training school attempts to emulate the traditional oral instruction model of transmission. One difference is that the participants' gender is no longer restricted: both males and females can become trainees. In addition, the once private emotional-sharing communication of scripts and culture have evolved into a public presentation of cultural knowledge. The teaching effect of this kind of short-term, large-scale cultural knowledge input is questioned. These courses give Nüshu learners a preliminary heritage experience rather than an in-depth comprehensive heritage practice. The transmission of Nüshu by general learners is still highly reliant on their self-study of the knowledge from Nüshu publications rather than from the senior bearers.

5.2.2 Dilemmas in Academic Accessibility

In Chapter 2.1, it was demonstrated that there are nearly 1,000 Nüshu-related academic works that can be found on CNKI, China's largest academic platform. Scholars and cultural departments could easily access these academic works as Nüshu learning resources through their institutions. These documents are relatively easy to find and can be obtained free of charge by research institutions and universities. However, the availability of these literatures to ordinary learners, especially folk and indigenous learners, remains difficult as they usually need to purchase each article at their own expense. In order to improve the availability of Nüshu literature, some folk Nüshu people have established a 'Folk Nüshu Study Association (民间女书学屋)[22]' through the Tencent 'QQ Group'. Since 2017, group members have spontaneously uploaded their collected documents to a cloud storage space called 'Group Files' and the others can download them for free. This space provides an accessible channel for cultural enthusiasts who have difficulty accessing academic resources. The activity on this

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[22] The QQ Group 'Folk Nüshu Study Association (民间女书学屋)' was renamed to 'Nüshu Cultural Group (女书文化群)' in 2021 by the group organiser.

heritage knowledge sharing channel demonstrates the significance of digital social platforms for the spread and inheritance of heritage.

5.2.3 Websites on Cultural Heritage

With the popularity of the Internet in China, it has gradually become an important channel for spreading culture. Nüshu is known by the public through a variety of cultural websites. These websites have become one of the effective ways for researchers and learners to understand this culture, especially its latest developments. These websites are of three main categories: 1. Special websites for tangible and intangible cultural heritage such as China's ICH website *ihchina.cn* and its 'Dictionary' of Hunan Province; the website on Hunan's Cultural Heritage *www.hnwhyc.com*; and the Database of Hunan's ICH *hnfy1.txhn.net*. 2. Municipal and County Governments' official websites, which share pages about local culture projects such as the official website of Yongzhou Municipal Government *yzcity.gov.cn* and the official website of Jiangyong County Government *jiangyong.gov.cn.* 3. Provincial and municipal news websites and their cultural channels such as *rednet.cn*.

Figure 9 shows the results of searching for Nüshu on the Jiangyong County Government website. The 403 results that can be found mostly reflect the arrangements, plans, measures and achievements of the local heritage departments in the heritage. The recent posts mainly focus on themes such as cultural tourism development, Nüshu's intellectual property protection and Nüshu's internationalisation. Among all the posts, Nüshu's representation and activities in the folk society and the indigenous community are scarcely found. The information and knowledge on this website still reflect the values of Chinese official heritage discourse.

Figure 9. Nüshu on the official website of the People's Government of Jiangyong County.

5.2.4 Ecological Museum and Tourism Development

The Nüshu Ecological Museum was established in Jiangyong in 2002 when a few authenticated transmitters were designated by the local heritage authorities to be settled in the museum, where they could offer oral teaching to Nüshu learners and provide tourist services to visitors. The museum has become an important base for collecting, protecting, spreading and displaying the Nüshu culture. The tourist services I experienced showed that Nüshu transmitters are likely to repeat a set of 'standardised operation procedures' for each group of tourists, including leading them into the museum, introducing and explaining heritage knowledge in the showrooms, singing a Nüshu song, teaching simple Nüshu scripts and finally visiting souvenir shops (see Figure 10). They are busy receiving tourists day after day. Compared to the identity of a 'Representative Cultural Heritage Transmitter', the transmitters who work in the museum seem more like tour guides.

Respondent 16 (interview in August 2018) said that the annual ticket income reached up to 800,000 RMB in 2017. This income needs to be turned over to the local heritage authorities and becomes an important source of income for several local sectors. The local heritage authorities have seen the benefits of heritage tourism in recent years, so

they put more emphasis on heritage tourism and cultural industry development. I was at the Nüshu Museum during the summer vacation, which was the peak tourist period of the year. A museum staff member said that with the rise of cultural tourism in recent years, there have been more and more tourists and that therefore, the county government plans to further expand and renovate the museum, especially the toilets, responding to the *Toilet Revolution*[23] called for by the Central Government in order to facilitate more tourists and improve the quality of services. In the overall environment of heritage tourism development, the protection of the heritage itself, such as collecting and protecting original Nüshu materials, protecting existing indigenous bearers, improving their living conditions and further encouraging them to continue the heritage in a nearly traditional way, seems not as important as various industry developments to the local authorities.

Figure 10.   Hu Meiyue teaching and singing for visitors in the Nüshu Museum (photograph taken by the author in July 2018)

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[23] The Toilet Revolution in China is a government campaign aimed at improving the sanitary conditions in Mainland China. The 'Toilet revolution' entry in the State Council Information Office's 2015 'Dictionary of Xi Jinping's new terms' explains the campaign: 'Along with agricultural modernisation and new rural construction, local governments will ensure that villagers have access to hygienic toilets'.

The analysis finds that this ecological heritage museum and the summer school teaching model have spread and preserved Nüshu culture to some extent. However, the lack of interactivity, the rigid standardised procedures of exhibition as communication, and the emphasis on economic interests mean that these old media spaces cannot provide a traditional home for cultural sharing for heritage bearers.

In short, this section presents problems in several methods of heritage transmission. To be more specific, lack of accessibility lies in that the provision of short-term heritage courses still does not provide cultural enthusiasts with a comprehensive and immersive heritage experience. The transportation and boarding expenses to the Nüshu Village in Jiangyong are still unbearable for some of the learners. In addition, a number of non-institutional learners and bearers find it difficult to obtain or afford Nüshu academic publications. A lack of interactivity lies in the fact that institutions and official-led heritage sites are flooded with information from cultural and political elites, ignoring the existence of the indigenous community members and their needs. The four channels for cultural dissemination discussed above have not provided the folk and indigenous heritage community with a sufficient space for information access, participant gathering and heritage expression.

Under these circumstances, the grassroots, indigenous heritage participants decided to seek a space that could help achieve gathering and expression. Various online platforms have gradually become venues for them to realise the protection, dissemination, inheritance and development of heritage from their own perspective. This trend started in the early 21st century when China became involved in the Digital Age. The social influence of these newly-built spaces has not accumulated enough academic attention. The following analysis demonstrates how the Nüshu heritage has been developed by the folk indigenous heritage group on social media and how this group achieves hot authentication.

5.3 Nüshu Practices Outside of Government Sanctioned Sphere of Tourism and Transmitters

At present, in addition to the tourism and communication forms approved by the government, there are still such practices by folk Nüshu inheritors and learners. The forms of tourism and cultural industry approved by the government is mainly reflected in promoting the integrated development of culture and tourism based on Nüshu customs, ancient village culture and tourism resources with Yao characteristics. The government cooperates with tourism enterprises and cultural promotion ambassadors to connect Jiangyong local area with other cities in the province and other Chinese cities. Many tourism projects combining research, study and experience tours have been designed and carried out. In terms of cultural and creative development of Nüshu culture, a remarkable case is that government managers and departments have signed contracts with specific enterprises to guide the development proposal of Nüshu garment industry, and supported these enterprises and individuals with official designation by awarding some entrepreneurs the titles of 'Nüshu Garment Brand Promotion Ambassador' and 'Nüshu Wedding Brand Promotion Ambassador' so that they can carry out Nüshu business operation legally. In addition, some transmitters with the official title usually own their Nüshu cultural training courses and sell their calligraphy and handicrafts works in online and offline stores.

The government's tourism development and cultural and creative commercial operations are based on the support of funds, policies and the rule of law. In contrast, the ability of folk heritage participants to participate in tourism and entrepreneurship is relatively weak. In the field survey in 2018, I found that non-official, folk Nüshu inheritors and learners seldom carry out Nüshu related tourism and cultural industry business. A few noteworthy cases are that a folk Nüshu amateur and inheritor opened a private Nüshu gallery called 'China Nüshu Gallery (in Chinese: 中国女书馆)' in Lingling[24], China in 2018. The Gallery mainly displays and sells

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[24] Note: Lingling is a municipal district under the jurisdiction of Yongzhou City, Hunan Province, China

Nüshu works created by folk Nüshu participants and the curator and founder of the gallery, as well as some rough Nüshu handicrafts.

Another example is the 'Nüshu Image Art Gallery (in Chinese: 女书意象艺术馆)' founded by a local female transmitter in Jiangyong County. The creator and curator of the gallery have certain media communication and curational ability. She found the gallery with the support of personal investment and investment from the civil society. The gallery is committed to promoting the folk exhibition and exchange of Nüshu culture through the integration of social resources, promoting the development of Nüshu cultural and creative industry, and building a Nüshu cultural folk cooperation and promotion platform integrating inheritance, innovation, exhibition, exchange and cultural and creative development. Based on the folk cultural, social and economic capital, the gallery attempts to develop the works of some Nüshu artists, and plans to cooperate to launch cultural and tourism products, such as the Nüshu themed home stay project. At present, these non-governmental cooperation oriented Nüshu tourism and cultural and creative projects are gradually promoted.

For most folk amateurs, Nüshu is more like their cultural and spiritual pursuit after work and life, and they rarely have spare time and energy to engage in or develop related industries. The majority of these heritage inheritors have not been given an orthodox and officially established identity, so they cannot obtain and rely on the financial, policy and institutional support from the cultural sector. The Nüshu commercialisation model founded and operated by individuals requires the founders to be good at the integration and utilisation of social resources. However, the development in recent years demonstrate that the folk cultural society is trying to integrate folk resources to create their unique Nüshu industrialisation development pathway. Generating a hot authentication of heritage by them is a remarkable transformation.

5.4 Generating Hot Authentication of Heritage

Cohen and Cohen (2012) propose the characteristics of hot authentication. They emphasise that hot authentication is a participatory public behaviour, the degree of which has a great influence on the realisation of hot authentication. There is no single authorised agent in hot authentication; it is dynamic, proliferating and growing. Given this concept, the analysis in this section demonstrates the making of hot authentication in the Nüshu Heritage Community. In China, digital communities and social media have become important platforms for heritage's hot authentication. Heritage participants, especially the folk and indigenous heritage participants, realise heritage participation and their authentication through digital social media practices, which expand the influence of the folk heritage group in heritage-making.

5.4.1 Chinese WeChat Platform and Heritage Social Media

This section describes how Chinese social media gathers different groups of heritage participants, which ultimately supports the public participation of folk heritage participants and the achievement of the hot authentication of the heritage. China owns the world's largest social network and instant messaging (IM) network, which integrates video, news, e-commerce and various other services, although these extremely popular social networks in China are largely unknown by the world outside of China (We Are Social, 2017). By 2019, China's population had reached 1.4 billion and social media users had exceeded 1 billion. In China, the three most popular social media platforms are WeChat, QQ and Weibo (Topdigital Agency, 2019). Tencent's *2019 Third-Quarter Financial Report* shows that WeChat users reached 1.1 billion and QQ users reached 700 million in September 2019 (Tencent, 2019). In 2011, Tencent launched WeChat, a mobile Internet-based IM application. WeChat is a social media application owned by the Chinese technology giant Tencent. It is a voice and text messaging service platform similar to WhatsApp, but also includes games, shopping and financial services.

In August 2012, Tencent launched 'Gong Zhong Hao' (公众号, officially translated 'WeChat Official Accounts' by Tencent), which is a sub-product on WeChat. According to the definition given by Tencent, WeChat Official Accounts are application accounts applied by developers or merchants on WeChat public platforms. Through the Official Accounts, developers and merchants can achieve full integration, communication and interaction with specific groups in the form of texts, pictures, voice and video on the WeChat platform. The Official Accounts disseminate information through message push. WeChat users receive the Official Accounts information through subscriptions. Users can interact with them and can also share the Official Accounts' messages to their personal networks for secondary dissemination.

Therefore, the word 'official' in its English translation cannot be narrowly understood to mean accounts that official governmental agencies are responsible for, but rather service platforms that provide business services and user management to individuals, businesses and organisations. WeChat Official Accounts can provide a new way of information dissemination for individuals and build a better communication and management model with readers. WeChat public platforms were launched in China in 2012. By 2020, there were more than 20 million WeChat Official Accounts (Data Xigua, 2020). Such accounts continue to increase in various industries. Many Internet users in China today have taken the Official Accounts as one of the main ways to obtain information and knowledge.

Due to the vast influence and coverage of social networking applications in Chinese society, these social media platforms have long been widely used by cultural heritage participants and practitioners who seek opportunities for participatory communication, sharing culture and heritage practices. In the Nüshu community, a large number of learners are obtaining heritage knowledge and information through WeChat platforms. Nüshu transmitters, practitioners and researchers from indigenous or official backgrounds have established their own Official Accounts to share their heritage practices.

This research found 46 accounts with a Nüshu theme by searching on the WeChat public platform. These accounts are classified and analysed by the researcher. To achieve the analysis, this research collected and collated the 46 platforms, the operators, the background of the operating team (official background, folk background, research institutional background), the date of the first update, the date of the last update, the number of posts (mainly articles) published, the main contents of the article, as well as the views and audience of the published contents. This study recorded data generated from 2014 to March 2020, after which this dissertation was written. Some of these data are presented in figures below. The following analysis presents how Nüshu participants achieve the dissemination and protection of Nüshu culture and how they implement a folk heritage discourse and build and negotiate their heritage identity by drawing on China's WeChat.

5.4.2 Operators of Heritage Social Media

This section analyses the heritage-themed social media of groups of different backgrounds. The analysis demonstrates that social media platforms support the hot authentication of folk and indigenous heritage communities. The main founders and operators of these 46 searchable WeChat Official Accounts under the theme of Nüshu are divided into the following three categories.

a. Folk individuals, organisations and business practitioners

'Nü Shu Wen Hua (女书文化, Nüshu Culture)' [25] Official Accounts, which are established and operated by folk individuals, have become one of the representative online platforms for Nüshu learners to obtain Nüshu knowledge and to monitor the progress of the heritage in the indigenous society. In addition, several cultural heritage bearers, cultural creative designers, and cultural industry practitioners have created their Nüshu Official Accounts as a comprehensive platform for cultural communication,

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[25] By early 2021, the account was renamed to 'Guanyinshan Nüshu wenhua (in Chinese: 观音山女书文化)' by the organiser. Available from: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/mp/profile_ext?action=home&__biz=MzI1NjI4OTE 3Nw==&scene=124#wechat_redirect

cultural and creative work display and sale and personal publicity, such as 'Nü Shu Ai Lian (女书爱莲)' and 'Nü Shu Yi Xiang Studio (女书意象工作室)'. Nüshu Official Accounts established by folk groups, such as the team that is filming the Nüshu-themed film 'Nü Shu Mi Shan (女书秘扇, Nüshu Secret Fan)' and the 'Nü Shu Song (女书颂)' operated by cultural amateurs from a college entrepreneurship team. These accounts constitute a discourse space for online folk heritage participants.

b. Academic and Research Institutes

These institutes created Nüshu-themed Official Accounts to record their fieldwork and research diary in Jiangyong and edit and share Nüshu cultural knowledge. Some college students or teams use their Official Accounts to promote their Nüshu-themed cultural creative designs and products. For example, the 'Nü Shu Yun (女书韵)' Official Account is operated by a student team of Nüshu Communication and Entrepreneurship from Hunan Female University. This team established a Nüshu Coffee House as well as a Nüshu-themed Clothing Design Studio. They used this account to record and share Nüshu knowledge and their fieldwork experience in Jiangyong. They later found an approach that could be used to continue their Nüshu work, that is, exploring Nüshu's aesthetic and economic value.

The transformation from cultural recording to cultural entrepreneurship ensured the continuity of their account. Their account is the only one of the twelve Official Accounts operated by academic organisations that still updating its Nüshu content. The other eleven accounts stopped updating after they finished their fieldwork in Jiangyong. This phenomenon demonstrates that an account that can be continuously operated, dependent to a large extent on the institution's continuous investment in Nüshu research, the successful experience of cultural entrepreneurship projects and the human investment in the operation of the account.

c. Official Individuals and Organisations

Several heritage management departments have established Nüshu Official Accounts, such as the 'NVSHU' operated by Nüshu (Beijing) International Cultural Exchange Centre and the Account named 'Jiangyong Nüshu Culture Research and Management Centre' operated by the local cultural departments. These accounts, operated by heritage sectors, usually present the latest developments of Nüshu, Nüshu in national and international cultural events and the results of Nüshu cultural communication, research, and industry innovation under the national and local heritage discourse.

Further, several individuals who have been granted authorised identities from the local authorities have established WeChat Official Accounts. For example, several Nüshu Transmitters and Nüshu Promotion Ambassadors have their own accounts to record their heritage activities such as their cultural lectures, forums, trainings and their achievements such as cultural awards from the authorities. These accounts are also key places to display and sell their Nüshu artworks.

According to the statistics collected by this study, among all Nüshu-related Official Accounts, the number operated by folk individuals and organisations is the largest, having reached 50%. The accounts operated by academic and research institutions account for 26%, and the accounts operated by official heritage departments account for 24% (see Figure 11). The data show that folk Nüshu cultural participants are more inclined to use online media platforms as the channel for their voices, and these online platforms have also become an important carrier for them to stimulate folk heritage discourse.
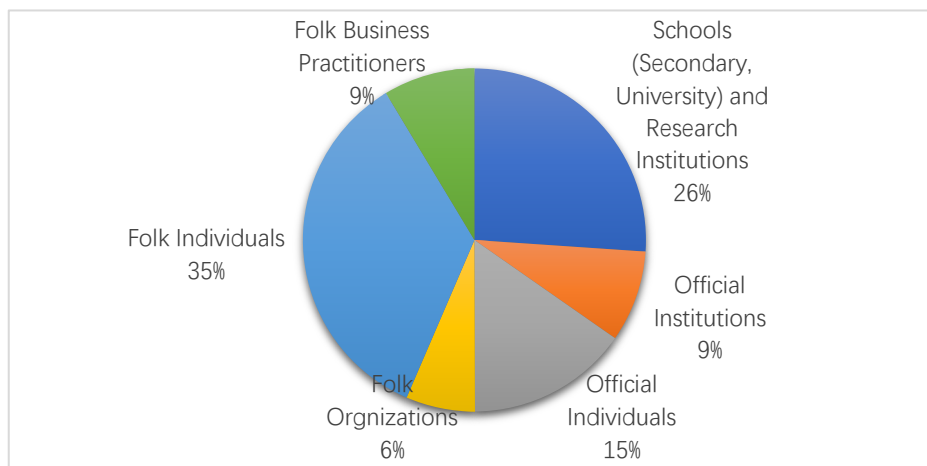
Figure 11.   Operators of Nüshu WeChat Official Accounts (data collected by the author in March 2020)

5.4.3 Vitality and Motivation

Although hot authentication embodies a spontaneous collection and accumulation of heritage participants and their knowledge, the continuity of its vitality remains to be verified. Since 2014, new Nüshu-themed Official Accounts have been created every year (see Figure 12). However, according to the update time of the latest article on these accounts (see Figure 13), over half of these accounts had stopped updating by 2019, while 43.5% of accounts kept renewing their contents as of 2019. One situation that has to be mentioned here is that by March 2020 when the author is writing this chapter, only nine accounts publishing new articles and Nüshu-related information remain active. Of these nine accounts, five of them belong to folk individuals and organisations, three of them are operated by official heritage participants and one of them is operated by an academic and research institution.
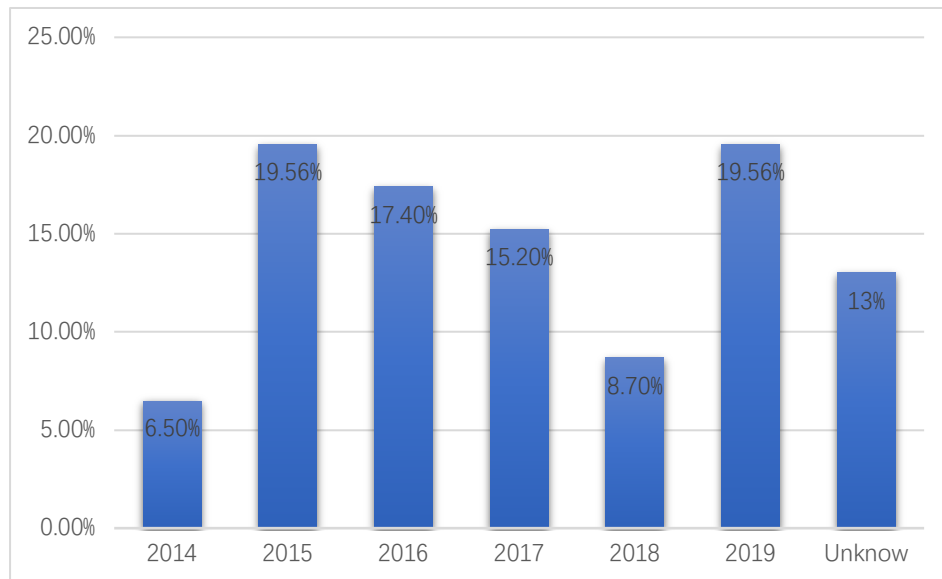
Figure 12.   Year of the First Publication of Nüshu WeChat Official Accounts (data collected by the author in March 2020)

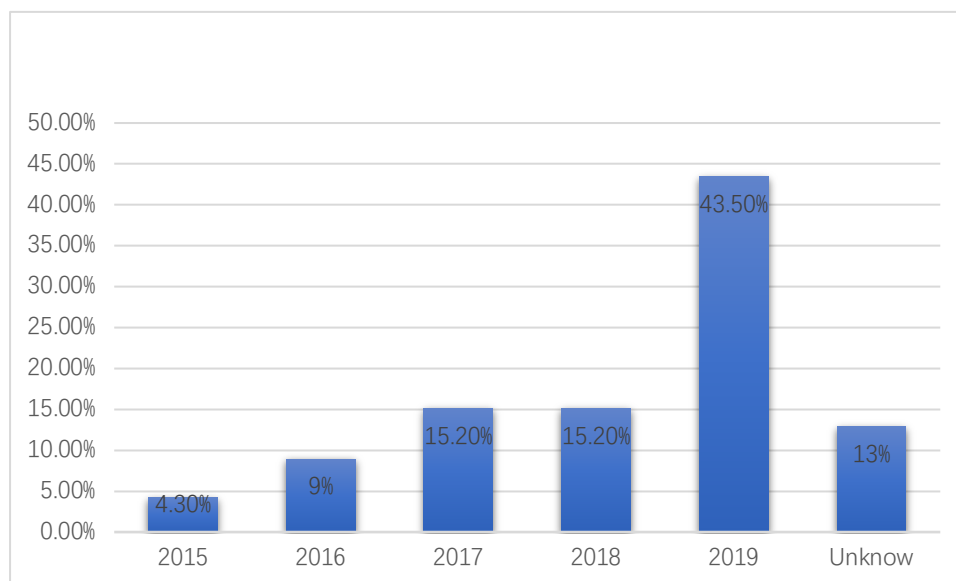Figure 13.   Year of Last Publication of Nüshu WeChat Official Accounts (data collected by the author in March 2020)

These data demonstrate that although Official Accounts have been an important channel for the communication of cultural heritage and have been widely used by heritage participants since 2014, the persistence of transmitting and preserving heritage through this kind of channel has yet to be verified.

5.4.4 Heritage as User-Generated Content (UGC)

Hot authentication is an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object's, site's or event's authenticity and is dynamic and maintained and enhanced by the behaviour of participants (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). In the hot authentication of Nüshu heritage, it can be seen that a large number of heritage participants have become the content contributors on these heritage social media, and their heritage practices demonstrate the hot authentication of heritage in the folk heritage community.

Social media allows the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content[26] (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61). These 46 searchable Nüshu-themed Official Accounts have published a total of 2,555 user-created posts over the past few years (as of January 2020). It is worth noting that of this enormous number, nearly 2,100 posts were contributed by the active accounts, that is, the nine accounts that had been continuously updated in the past three months. Of these 2,100 articles, 68% of the posts were contributed by the Official Accounts operated by the folk participants. It is worth noting that more than 1,200 posts were published by 'Nu Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture)', which is operated by folk individuals.

In recent years, each of these nine active accounts have posted an average of 418 Nüshu-related posts while each inactive account posted less than ten pieces of content on average. It can be observed that the Nüshu content on WeChat platforms relies heavily on the contributions of a few active accounts. These active accounts play a vital role in Nüshu's online communication and have become the main channels for other Nüshu heritage participants to obtain relevant information. These active Official Accounts have created a considerable amount of content. However, by observing the

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[26] User-generated content (UGC), alternatively known as user-created content (UCC), is any form of content, such as images, videos, text and audio, that has been posted by users on online platforms such as social media and wikis. It is a product consumers create to disseminate online products or the firm that markets it.

views of each active account, the data demonstrate that the number of views on each post is not that high. The average views of each article are around 100. There are even contents with only a dozen viewers.

During the interview, some interviewees who had operation experience with Official Accounts stated that insufficient views decrease their motivation to continue heritage transmission and communication. Reasons such as lack of followers, readers and interactions and lack of financial and technical support have led to a large number of folk heritage Official Accounts operators losing their motivation to continue. The Accounts that survive usually rely on the operator's strong commitment and willingness to spread the cultural heritage or on the financial and technical support from other channels.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that in the Nüshu community, traditional heritage communication methods reflect problems in terms of accessibility, interactivity, cultural and political elitism and centralisation in economic interests. It shows the current status of Nüshu-themed social media platforms, including the organisers, activities, contents and views and demonstrates the impact of the development of new media WeChat in China on the cultural heritage of Nüshu. The emergence of new media based on the Internet and digital technology has changed the way in which cultural heritage is spread and passed on.

This chapter demonstrates that digital technology and social media have given non-elite and indigenous members a space to gather, express, participate, and transmit, realising a kind of hot authentication of heritage. It finds that the folk Nüshu participants prefer to use online media platforms as their discourse channels, and these online platforms have also become important carriers for them to construct and reinforce their folk heritage discourse. However, the Nüshu content on the WeChat platforms relies heavily on the contributions of a few active accounts. Due to the lack

of followers, readers, interactions and lack of funds and technical support, some operators have lost the incentive to continue operating. The continuity of heritage inheritance and preservation through digital forms is questioned. This is despite the fact that social media has already become an important channel for Nüshu's inheritance and development and has constituted great social impacts in this community, especially in the heritage identity-making and discourse making of folk heritage participants.

This study finds that digital technology and social media have become crucial tools for Nüshu participants to communicate and represent their heritage practices. They constitute social influence that cannot be ignored, especially in the construction of heritage identity and discourse in the folk heritage participants. Openness is one of the key features of this participating network, as digitalised heritage contents can be widely used to cover more and more markets and visitors. Based on various open and participatory heritage networks, heritage participants, especially those from indigenous communities, are given a space for their interpretation and inheritance of traditional knowledge, and the public are given a chance to access to various heritages. Heritage practices on these participatory platforms have demonstrated the positive significance of digital measures to heritage vitality. The hot authentication of the Nüshu heritage is shaped, maintained and enhanced in the Nüshu community through the construction of social media platforms and the contributions of UGC contributors.

This analysis allows readers to have a sense and understanding of the status of Nüshu culture on China's largest social media platform WeChat. However, this study is not going to cover and analyse all of the content of the 46 platforms. In the following analysis, a representative heritage discourse platform developed by folk heritage participants is specifically analysed as a case study. It explains how social media can become the carrier of folk heritage discourse space, how it contributes to the identity-making of folk heritage participants and how heritage democratisation is practised in the Nüshu field.

Chapter Six: Folk Heritage Identity, Discourse and Democratisation

The significance of digital media to heritage democratisation has been discussed by scholars (Taylor and Gibson, 2017; Richardson, 2014; Brown and Nicholas, 2012; Edy, 2011). However, there is still lack of discussion on heritage democratisation in the Chinese context. This section demonstrates the development of Chinese social media and its influence on heritage practice and heritage-making in China and how folk heritage participants deal with cultural heritage in a bottom-up manner in order to prove that heritage democratisation is indeed happening at a grassroots level in China. This chapter also demonstrates how Chinese online social networks encourage the participation and co-creation of the grassroots cultural heritage participants and provide opportunities for heritage participants to reinforce their hot authentication. The analysis presents the interactions between the cool and hot authentications in Chinese heritage.

To be more specific, this chapter investigates the process of online voting selection of the 'Folk Heritage Transmitters' by Nüshu participants via the Internet and social media. The organisational background, candidates, selection mechanisms and the results of this event are specifically analysed. This chapter explores the social implications of such practices in a democratic dimension in heritage and illustrates how folk Nüshu participants achieve their folk, democratic heritage discourse by organising online social platforms, how they achieve heritage democratisation through heritage practices and how they shape, assert and reinforce their identity-making of heritage through their practices on Chinese heritage social media. This analysis also reflects whether the challenges from the folk heritage discourse against the official, authoritative heritage discourse are effective.

The following section investigates issues relating the identity-making of the folk heritage transmitters in Nüshu and why they are eager to develop heritage social media

on their own. This analysis reveals the connections between the concepts of self-presentation, heritage identity-making, as well as the brand-making in heritage.

6.1 'Self' Presentation for Brand-making

In 1959, Goffman, a Canadian sociologist, systematically discussed the theory of 'self-presentation'. He believed that everyone is trying to maintain a proper impression in the social environment in order to obtain a positive evaluation (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959; 1989) compared social interaction with dramatic performance and believed that people choose verbal and non-verbal behaviours in social interaction to achieve an 'expected impression', which reflects their self-expression impression management. The academic field believes that the motivation of self-presentation is mainly to meet the expectations of the society or specific situations. The self-presentation theory holds that in any form of social interaction, people try to control their impressions in the eyes of others (Goffman, 1989; Schlenker, 2012).

Since the emergence of social media, people have gradually transferred social activities to the Internet, and they build their own images through texts, images, sounds and other symbolic systems (Hogan, 2010). In social media, people 'dominate' their personal homepages, albums, statuses and logs through texts, images, audio, video and other ways to interact with each other, which forms a new type of social interaction. This text- and symbol-oriented approach is becoming the most important way of self-presentation in social media. In addition, the relationship between social media and brand has also been widely discussed, especially in the business field. Current studies particularly emphasise the significance of social media to brand making, marketing and industrial development. Social media implies opportunities for brand building (Correa, Hinsley and De Zúñiga, 2010), brand equity creation (Laroche et al., 2012) and brand management (Godey et al., 2016). The visual characteristics of social media provide advantages for various products and services. By sharing on social media, practitioners can build their reputation in the industry and increase the chance of being seen, thereby

increasing brand awareness and potential customers. Practitioners on social media also have the opportunity to interact with their peers and to monitor how they are progressing in business.

However, there are currently few works in the field of heritage that focus on how heritage participants implement self-presentation and branding through social media and how such self-presentation matters in their heritage identity-making. The following analysis demonstrates these connections.

> 'I choose Official Accounts to disseminate Nüshu culture because now everyone has WeChat. WeChat is so popular. I can use the convenience of WeChat to disseminate Nüshu. Other people can use an app or a website to disseminate it, but I don't have that kind of ability. I do not have the ability to develop an app or design a website. WeChat is like a self-media, just like its slogan 'No matter how small individuals are, they can have their **own brands**'. That is to say, anyone can own an account by themselves. This kind of way is suitable for both amateurs and professionals'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, September 2018)

The folk heritage participants choose the digital platforms and social media as a space for the construction of their heritage discourse due to the convenience and popularity of these platforms. With the characteristics of popularisation, the content on these platforms is relatively easy to be accessed and shared by the general public. The supportive technology of these platforms is easy to be mastered by content creators who neither need complicated devices nor spend excessive time, workforce or money to output their content.

These folk heritage discourse spaces on digital platforms and social media are often organised and operated by individual participants. Interviewees often call these spaces 'self-media (自媒体)'. These heritage participants who own their self-media are considered 'small individuals (小的个体)' (mentioned by Respondent 14 in interview in September 2018) in this society. The expression of 'small' implies these participants may seem not that important; they seem too insignificant to add great value to the

historical process of the cultural heritage, and have no power to change the history of heritage. However, these self-media platforms can give these 'small individuals' opportunities to present their unique ways of thinking and behaviour, thereby forming a kind of identity represented by themselves, a spiritual symbol, as well as their own values, ideas and qualities. In the words of the respondent, they can form their own 'brand' of heritage. For folk Nüshu cultural participants, these online self-media channels have become a multifunctional platform for their voice, dissemination and communication. Folk heritage discourse is embedded in these spaces, operated by the folk heritage actors. Their voice, dissemination and communication of heritage in this special space finally form a part of the history of the heritage.

As a product of discourse practices, the identity of the folk heritage participants can gradually be approved. This further means that the folk individuals and groups that have established their own heritage 'brands' can distinguish themselves from and even form a competitive relationship against the other heritage identity groups (such as official heritage representatives) of this heritage field. As discussed in the previous chapter, within the official heritage discourse, the local heritage authorities claim that they have obtained Nüshu's 'Heritage Brand' by registering a series of trademarks and implementing local heritage rules and laws in order to protect their 'property rights' of these brands. They are determined in claiming their ownership and exclusive rights to local heritage projects and ignoring the indigenous heritage participants in order to obtain a monopoly on local heritage resources. Given this condition, folk heritage participants develop their exclusive heritage 'brands' through building their own digital self-media. To some extent, a competitive relationship between the folk heritage brands and the official brands is formed, even though the folk groups are often in a passive and disadvantageous position. Nevertheless, they have never given up their willingness to establish a folk heritage discourse and reinforce their heritage identity. This study finds a representative platform, an Official Account named 'Nü Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture)' and investigates the establishment and operation of the platform. This

Account was founded in 2016. By the early 2020, the account platform has published more than 1,200 pieces of content, making it the Nüshu WeChat Official Account with the largest number of posts. The users and contributors of this Official Account are mainly folk Nüshu bearers, who provide UCGs including Nüshu knowledge, experiences and works of folk Nüshu bearers and the multi-dimensional development of Nüshu in contemporary China. The operator is never alone in making and developing the heritage space. Behind him are a large number of cultural content contributors and viewers from the indigenous heritage community.

Before the online voting event for selecting the Folk Nüshu Transmitters in September 2018, the Nü Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture) Account has accumulated more than 900 followers. The number of followers reached nearly 1,500 at the end of the selection. By January 2020, the Official Account had already attracted the attention of nearly two thousand people. The audience of the Official Account is spread all over China, mainly from Hunan Province (40%). There are also some overseas Nüshu participants following this platform.

This platform has achieved the purposes of sharing and retaining heritage knowledge, gathering participants and constructing heritage transformation, which are difficult to achieve even for official institutional heritage databases. This platform not only enables heritage bearers to disseminate cultural heritage, but also bridges the users (heritage bearers and practitioners) and connects the users and the culture. With the operation of these platforms, Nüshu culture is no longer a cultural-political work for a small number of heritage elites such as scholars, heritage governors or the authenticated representatives heritage transmitters, but is further open to the general public and the grassroots. Based on the foundation of the broad audience of the heritage from the folk community and the flexibility and openness of the Internet, the organiser of the platform was able to carry out a series of heritage activities for the folk group. The most influential event was the online voting selection of the 'Folk Nüshu Transmitters', as an event reinforcing the hot authentication of heritage, which is discussed below.

6.2 Reinforcing Hot Authentication of Heritage

In the existing knowledge about the hot authentication of heritage, it is believed that hot authentication is an emotional load based on belief rather than evidence. Hot authentication is often an informal act for creating, preserving and strengthening the authenticity of an object. This process may lack a recognised agency for authentication (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). When performing hot authentication behaviours, it is often characterised by a sense of community (Turner, 1973). Hot authentication is not clearly formulated, but socially generated in the process of participation. Hot authentication is a process of emotional self-reinforcing (Cohen and Cohen, 2012).

The hot authentication of the folk, indigenous Nüshu community has been strengthened in recent years by the folk heritage participants through a series of interactive actions and practices based on the making and maintaining of the online folk heritage social media platforms. In the previous chapter, the generation of social media supports the presentation of the hot authentication of the folk heritage. The following analysis demonstrates how the folk heritage participants improve their hot authentication, through which they claim their heritage identity and heritage authenticity and build their own indigenous heritage discourse, thereby realising a bottom-up decision-making of heritage.

> 'Before the Nüshu Training Course in August 2018, the official had announced that a new batch of "Nüshu Transmitters" would be selected from the trainees. But so far, no results have been achieved. There are only seven authenticated transmitters who have been titled "Nüshu Transmitters" since the early 2000s. As a result, many people believe that there are only seven people who know Nüshu at present and the scripts written by these Nüshu Transmitters are absolutely correct. I'm afraid is this really funny? Nüshu has never belonged to you or me'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, September 2018)

> '... We are not willing to deliberately make Nüshu mysterious and secretive. We don't make it a "huge secret (天大的机密)" or a "throne" to be inherited (有皇位要继承). "Nüshu Transmitter" is now a title that can only be "knighted (加封)". This granting ceremony satisfies the self-

esteem of the grantor and also stimulates the enthusiasm of the granted ones. On the other hand, as you know, when a thing is rare, it becomes precious. That's why the number of "Nüshu Transmitters" must be strictly controlled. The granting system is an excellent way to monopolise Nüshu's cultural and economic interests'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, September 2018)

The data above demonstrate why the folk platform organisers decide to hold events to select the Folk Nüshu Transmitters from the indigenous community. Since the implementation of the System of Nüshu Representative Transmitters (代表性传承人制度) in 2001, only seven people have been given the title of 'Nüshu Transmitter'. The number, as well as the selected people, have not been updated or changed for more than twenty years. As time has passed, they have become the representatives of correct heritage interpretation. Because they are authenticated and authorised by the heritage authorities from the local to national levels, they have become the only Nüshu bearers who are given social-political resources; therefore, they can be visible in the public eye. National governments often implement cool authentication 'from above' and rarely consider local opinions and attitudes (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). By contrast, most of the other Nüshu bearers were in a state of silence and invisibility.

The data reveal that Nüshu is deliberately packaged into a secret and a mystery in order to make the outside world think that Nüshu is a difficult thing to be understood, accessed and shared. Folk Nüshu participants believe that the number of Nüshu Transmitters is strictly limited because the local heritage authorities want to obtain a monopoly of the economic interests in heritage. Respondent 14 used an old Chinese saying, 'When a thing is rare, it becomes precious (物以稀为贵)', in order to demonstrate the reason of the limited coolly authenticated identities. On the other hand, the granters of cool authentication have proposed a series of privileges, restrictions and selection approaches under Chinese bureaucratic mechanisms. These 'title granters' have ultimately become the heritage manipulators.

Under such mechanisms, only the enthusiasm of the officially authenticated persons is stimulated. Most cultural bearers are getting involved in Nüshu without any sense of recognition, achievement or encouragement. In the long run, they may gradually lose their motivation for heritage, just as the large number of account operators who gave up updating their accounts due to the lack of engagement, interaction and technical and financial support. Cool authentication is often criticised, boycotted, controversial or negotiated (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2005), as is Nüshu's cool authentication. This has created tensions between stakeholders (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). Facing such heritage identity struggles, the organiser of the folk heritage group decided to hold a heritage event specially belonging to the folk Nüshu bearers to change their long-term marginalisation, un-authentication and invisibility. They decided to select a group of folk Nüshu Transmitters and give them titles and rewards through their particular mechanisms.

6.2.1 Cool Procedures for Hot Authentication

The analysis finds that the approaches and procedures of strengthening hot authentication in folk heritage communities are affected to some extent by the cool authentication. Some 'cool' procedures are set up for introducing and selecting the folk transmitters. This reflects the interaction between cool authentication and hot authentication in heritage practices. These two authentication modes in Chinese heritage are not isolated from, but, to some degree, relevant to each other.

On September 24, 2018, the organisers posted an announcement about the selection of the 'Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters (最美女书传承人)' on several Nüshu social media platforms. According to the announcement, this activity encouraged all Nüshu bearers to participate. Individual candidates were required to submit three forms of 'Competition Contents' after registration. First was 'Sing Nüshu' works. These works needed to demonstrate the candidates' ability to sing Nüge and could be in the form of audio or video. Second was 'Writing Nüshu' works to demonstrate the candidates'

ability to write Nüshu scripts. They could write with any types of tools as they liked, whether calligraphy brushes or stick-bamboo pens. The first and second requirements were imposed to prove the candidates' mastery in Nüshu knowledge and practices. Third, every candidate was asked to provide their 'Nüshu Biography', which included the candidates' life experience of disseminating and promoting Nüshu and their personal understanding and cognition of the culture. This requirement encouraged candidates to present photos, textual records, their Nüshu artworks, handcrafts and publications to demonstrate their family affiliation with the heritage, their efforts in the development of the heritage and their participation and engagement in the modern history of the heritage.

The announcement also demonstrated the 'Evaluation Criteria' of the selection. It was announced that a jury would be formed for this selection, which consisted of several prestigious time-honoured folk Nüshu researchers with decades of experience. The candidates' levels of singing and writing Nüshu, as well as their Nüshu biography, would be evaluated and scored. The total points for these three items were regarded as the 'basic points' of each candidate. In addition, an online poll would be issued via both the 'Nü Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture)' and 'Nü Shu Chuan Ren (Nüshu Transmitters)' WeChat Official Accounts. Each candidate was given a dedicated voting page to display their content, including their audio of singing Nüge, their scripts writing or calligraphy and their Nüshu practices in their life history (see Figure 14).
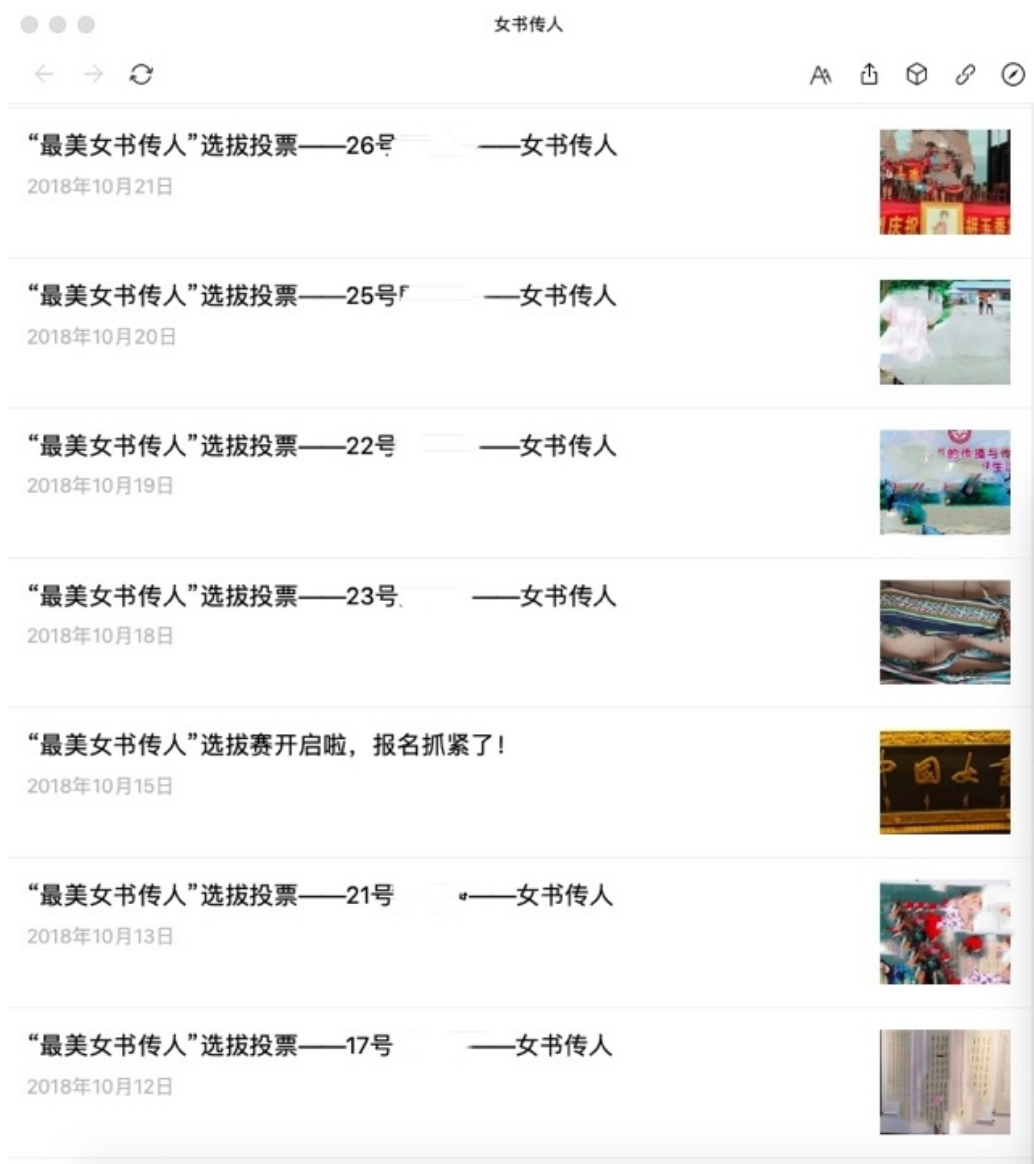
Figure 14.   The Voting Pages for the 'Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters'

6.2.2 Online Democratic Election for Hot Authentication in Chinese ICH

In the heritage authentication of the folk heritage community, a noticeable finding in this study was the application of a democratic election for authenticating folk heritage transmitters through the use of social media. This was a process in which Chinese netizens voted to elect heritage participants to hold specific positions in heritage on digital platforms. In politics, elections in China are based on a hierarchical electoral

system, divided into direct elections[27] and indirect elections[28]. Direct voting often occurs at a more basic level. For example, in the past 20 years, the election procedures in rural China have been greatly improved and many reasonably free and fair elections have been held (O'Brien and Han, 2009). This is a form of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. Even so, political elections cannot rid themselves of the shackles of their authoritative and hierarchical system or give the public sufficient space for democratic expression. Entering the Internet era, the relationship between the Chinese Internet and Chinese democracy has been noticed. The Chinese Internet is 'a platform for bottom-up information and public debate' (Zhou, 2009: 1006) and 'a new channel for individual expression' (Shen et al., 2009: 470), which 'democratises communication of information in Chinese society' (Tai, 2006: 289) and 'promotes political openness, transparency and accountability' (Zheng, 2007: 186).

A political, hierarchical and authoritative heritage system has been formed in China to strengthen empowering heritage authorities and governing Chinese ICH projects and heritage transmitters. However, in the Internet era, the relationship between Chinese heritage, Internet platforms and democratisation has become increasingly noticeable. By online voting, the folk heritage community could select their folk Nüshu transmitters. In the online election, candidates were encouraged to share their voting pages to other social platforms to reach more viewers to vote for them. All the viewers who saw the voting pages had the right to vote for the candidates they supported during the voting period. According to the procedures of the election event, every ten online votes a candidate achieved would be counted as one more point that would be added to the candidate's Basic Points. Further, each voter was only allowed to cast two votes in order to eliminate 'Shua Piao (刷票, which means online voting fraud)'.

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[27] People's Congresses of cities that are not divided into districts, counties, city districts, towns, townships or ethnic townships are directly elected.

[28] The Local People's Congress at each administrative level—other than the village level in rural areas, which hold direct elections—elects candidates for executive positions at that level of government.

In this case, the actions of the folk heritage community reflected China's democratic practice in the non-political field. This democratic practice was realised in the field of China's ICH. The widespread use and influence of the Internet and social media platforms in China have played an important role. The democratic online election of the folk transmitters embodied the values of freedom and fairness of the folk heritage community, which are different from the authorised heritage discourse in China's hierarchical official heritage management system (relying on the decision-making of the non-indigenous cultural experts and official institutions). This online democratic election provided a bottom-up channel for the expression of heritage, making the exchange of information about ICH Nüshu more democratic.

6.2.3 Social Identity, Self-evaluations, and Hot Authenticity

The event attracted 27 people to register through the Internet. This response shows the enthusiasm of the grassroots heritage bearers for the event, and also reflects the characteristics of interaction and appeal of the online heritage social media groups. Most of the candidates were Jiangyong locals. They called themselves 'Nüshu hometowners (女书家乡人)'; only four candidates came from areas outside Jiangyong, which demonstrates that the election was more attractive and significant to the heritage bearers from the indigenous heritage community.

The candidates had different social identities. Among them were farmers, migrant workers, educators, members of the Communist Party, freelancers, housewives, businesswomen, docents at the Nüshu Museum, calligraphers, bank staff, medical practitioners, publisher-editors, local CPPCC members and so on. 'Nüshu bearer' was never their only identity. Most of them learned and transmitted Nüshu in their free time after work. Candidates with different professions, with their social and cultural interactions with others, could make the Nüshu culture spread in different fields, such as banks, institutions, the art field, farmland and the families of these candidates.

> 'I have mastered Nüshu's recognition, reading, writing, singing and embroidery, and I am willing to contribute to the inheritance, sharing and promotion of Nüshu culture of my hometown!' (Candidate 1, October 7th, 2018)

Although these candidates were not 'Full-time Nüshu Transmitters', their participation in this event demonstrated that their Nüshu ability was not inferior to that of officially authenticated heritage transmitters. The Nüshu works they submitted on their candidate pages on the WeChat Official Accounts demonstrated that most of the candidates were proficient in Nüshu singing, writing, embroidering and composing. Indigenous and non-indigenous heritage participants showed different areas of expertise. Specifically, indigenous candidates (who were Jiangyong locals) excelled more in singing Nüge and usually obtained their 'singing Nüge' ability from their female eldership, however, some of them were not very good at writing the scripts. On the other hand, non-indigenous candidates (who were not Jiangyong locals) were sometimes better at writing Nüshu scripts, as they were usually the Nüshu calligraphers. Non-indigenous candidates usually did not master singing Nüge as they did not grow up in the environment of the Jiangyong dialect.

> '.... Looking at the current situation of Nüshu being on the extinction, for me, who love my hometown, I should shoulder the mission of inheriting the original ecology of Nüshu culture. To love her, I should protect her pristine foundation. To love her, I should keep her ecological features, plain beauty, and to let this true and natural beauty be passed down from our generation'. (Candidate 2, October 10th, 2018)

> 'I took part in the selection of the "Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters" with my enthusiasm. I participate in it because I am a Nüshu bearer. I would like to continue the transmission of the songs I got from my grandma! With the platforms of the Official Accounts of "Nü Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture)" and "Nü Shu Chuan Ren (Nüshu Transmitters)", I hope that we can spread Nüshu further and carry it forward'. (Candidate 3, October 20th, 2018)

The above statements are selected from the 'Nüshu Biography' of several candidates on their voting pages. Their participation in this event owed to their internal emotions about transmitting the heritage and the wish to demonstrate their heritage authenticity.

The participatory characteristics of the WeChat platforms were also factors allowing these people to engage in the election.

To be more specific, these folk heritage bearers believed that Nüshu has nearly failed to be handed down and borders on extinction. However, they still believe that Nüshu's 'foundation of transmission' is located in the folk Nüshu community. Compared to the other heritage learners, who rely on heritage training courses to gain knowledge, their advantage lies in that they could achieve and transmit Nüshu culture such as Nüge, the scripts and the customs directly from the elders in their families. In other words, they achieved Nüshu in a more 'natural' way as a 'collective memory' (see Roediger III and Abel, 2015; Hirst and Manier, 2008) of their family. For them, Nüshu is a shared pool of heritage memories, a heritage group's knowledge and information that is closely associated with the group's cultural identity. They believe that the collective heritage memories of the folk Nüshu bearers are the foundation that guarantees their transmission of heritage; the collective memories are the concrete that forms the solid base of not only cultural transmission but also the development of the Nüshu system in contemporary China.

With such a cultural identity, they regard inheriting Nüshu as a life mission and a vital job that the folk heritage community is given to shoulder. The folk heritage group is likely to have a strong commitment and sense of duty to achieve and inherit the cultural heritage. Many candidates demonstrate their enthusiasm and eagerness to engage in Nüshu activities. They have the ability to contribute to Nüshu's growth and the right to contribute to, exert power over and influence Nüshu's development in its contemporary form. The folk heritage bearers claimed that they are the main characters of the development of Nüshu's history rather than spectators, bystanders or 'puppets' dominated by the heritage authorities.

Hot authenticity focuses on self and social issues (Selwyn, 1996) through which participants usually seek their true self and their identity. The identities of these heritage

participants and their attitudes toward heritage authenticity are reflected in their words. Language such as 'yuan sheng tai (原生态, original ecology)', 'zhen shi (真实, authenticity, truth)', 'zi ran (自然, natural)' and 'pu shi (朴实, plain)' appeared in their self-evaluation on their voting pages to reinforce their heritage identity and ability. Specifically, they asserted that they still sung the same Nüge tones as their grandmothers, spoke the traditional Jiangyong dialect, lived in the land where Nüshu originated and followed the indigenous customs and rituals that the Nüshu ancestors followed. It seems that these tones, lifestyles, customs and rituals are part of their innate nature and talent, demonstrating a hot authenticity and hot authentication of the heritage. Their actions are the representation of the original, ecological cultural heritage, thus, the cultural heritage they represent is not artificial, processed or imagined. They emphasised that their Nüshu has all the qualities that it should have to deserve to be called Nüshu. The inheritance by the folk indigenous community can maintain Nüshu's down-to-earth characteristics; that is, Nüshu is not a culture that is difficult to understand and engage and it is not decorated or complicated, but a culture of the grassroots, a culture not overwhelmed by modifications.

In this study, the linkage is demonstrated between hot authenticity and the concept of 'subjective authenticity' of ICH (Su, 2018) in the Chinese heritage field, in which actors' subjective authenticity is constructed and claimed through their interactions with heritage in a certain social, cultural, economic and political environment. Studying the relationship between the subjective initiative and authenticity of heritage participants in the field of Chinese ICH could help to develop a more inclusive and broader understanding of the concept of authenticity. The evaluation of the heritage identity of folk Nüshu participants represents a process of concreting their subjective authenticity of the Chinese ICH.

The folk Nüshu bearers often stand far from the power centre; they are rarely given the opportunity to display their heritage practices to the public. Their social media accounts, as the platforms of participating, share heritage memories for the indigenous heritage

community, closely connecting these invisible heritage bearers with each other. These platforms become a battlefront for the folk heritage participants to publicly express their heritage opinions and make heritage progress. Their expressions allow increasing numbers of heritage participants and outsiders to understand the status and ideas of the folk heritage group. For this group of people, especially the candidates, the operation of their own social media groups makes it easier to present heritage memories by giving them stages on which they can show their cultural inheritance. The situation and status of these people in the heritage community have been improved to some extent. These folk heritage participants build their unique values based on their identities in heritage transmission, heritage authenticity and heritage participation. These values encourage them to actively engage in the transformation process of Nüshu in modern Chinese history.

6.3 'Otherness', Inclusivity and Exclusivity

Drawing on the concepts of 'the other' and 'identity', this section further explores the results of the online democratic election of folk heritage transmitters. In phenomenology, the term 'the other' identifies other human beings (Honderich, 2005). Otherness is the status of being dissimilar and unfamiliar to the social identity of an individual and to the identity of the self. The idea of otherness is essential to sociological studies of how majority and minority identities are built (Zevallos, 2011). Mead (1934) believes that social identities are formed through one's continuing social communications with other people and one's subsequent self-reflection after the interactions. Identity is shaped by means of agreements, divergences and dialogues with other people (ibid).

Considering the concept of otherness, this section finds the distinctions between the folk and the official heritage participants in terms of heritage identity and discourse in their mutual claiming of terms such as 'our', 'their' and 'the other'. This section demonstrates that the democratic heritage practices have formed a universal inclusivity

for the folk heritage participants on their own media channels through specific recognition mechanisms. However, on the other hand, the exclusion from the official heritage side is further strengthened.

6.3.1 Recognition and Inclusivity

The online voting began in early October 2018, and the result was announced on December 12, 2018 on both the 'Nu Shu Wen Hua (Nüshu Culture)' and 'Nu Shu Chuan Ren (Nüshu Transmitters)' Official Accounts. A total of ten Folk Nüshu Transmitters were selected and awarded the title of 'Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters'. In addition, nine were awarded the 'Nüshu Promotional Contribution Award', four were awarded the 'Nüshu Promotional Encouragement Award' and one was awarded the 'Singing Nüshu Transmitter' title.

These candidates with the title of 'Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters' were the bearers from the indigenous community with the most extraordinary Nüshu heritage ability. The bearers who achieved the 'Promotional Contribution Award' were mainly the bearers from the non-indigenous communities but were self-learning and inheriting the heritage in various places in China. Even some of the candidates who had certain Nüshu skills but did not get high scores were given an 'Encouragement Award', which can be regarded as a recognition of their continued contributions and support for them to maintain their heritage practices. In fact, every candidate participating in this event, whether they came from the indigenous heritage community or not, was granted an award. The organiser granted different titles according to the candidates' mastery in the heritage knowledge and practices. The difference in their titles was determined by the candidates' cultural capital, that is, their level of Nüshu competence, rather than their social or economic capital. No candidate was excluded from the folk heritage discourse, reflecting the inclusiveness and openness of the folk heritage discourse.

In the folk heritage discourse, these democratically selected bearers were given a particular authority or status after the event. Such a folk authority demonstrates that the

cultural identity of the folk participants is a reality that should be accepted not only by the heritage community but also the public. It also demonstrates that the heritage discourse they express is valid and deserves attention from the overall heritage community as well as the outside world. Such a democratic recognition means not only the recognition of the cultural capital of the folk actors, but also their influence and importance in the Nüshu field and their contribution and responsibility for inheritance of the heritage.

6.3.2 Distinction and Exclusivity

> 'This is the first time that our "Nüshu people's group (女书人群体)" selects Nüshu Transmitters by our **ourselves**. These people are awarded the title of "The Most Beautiful Nüshu Transmitters", which means they are the "Nüshu Transmitters selected by the folk society (民选女书传人)". The difference between the "officially-authenticated Nüshu Transmitters（官封传人)" and **ours** should be highlighted. The Transmitters selected by us possess the abilities to listen, speak, read, write, sing and transmit Nüshu, and carry out individual Nüshu research. At least, these people are recognised in **our** community'. (Nüshu WeChat Official Account, December 12, 2018)

The example given above reveals, by highlighting the separation of 'our' and 'their' in heritage, that the boundary and distinction between the folk heritage participants and official heritage participants was widened by this selection event. Likenesses and variances in values and beliefs are crucial for actors to grow the consciousness of identity and social belonging. In this dimension, identity is exclusive (Zevallos, 2011). Bauman (1990) argues that identities are found as contrasts and oppositions by erecting social groupings as dualistic counterparts in many societies; the term 'the other' creates a sense of belonging, identity and social status. Okolie (2003) argues that social identities are reciprocally negotiated. A group of actors usually describe themselves by opposing the identity of others so that social implications can be remarked on. In other words, by defining itself, a particular group can define others. These definitions often have certain goals and consequences. In this case, the folk heritage participants are

consolidating their heritage identity-making by strengthening the opposition to the official heritage discourse.

The distinction between the official and the folk heritage groups implies that the official heritage participants and the folk heritage participants are not likely to share the same discourse scope. This study demonstrates that there are great differences between the official and folk heritage discourses in terms of interests, goals, organisations and values. Specifically, the folk heritage participants usually do not have a strong sense of pursuit and acquisition of commercial or political interests in utilising and occupying heritage, which is in contrast to the official heritage discourse, which is accelerating the industrialisation and nationalisation of heritage. The folk heritage bearers are more likely to engage in and pass down cultural heritage through personal hobbies or family traditions. The organisation of the folk heritage community is relatively unfastened, lacking effective leadership and management. The folk heritage community seems to be in a state of 'laissez-faire'. Their activities are left unchecked as long as their activities do not come into contact with the interests of the local official heritage community. Compared with the official transmitters, they are less likely to sing or write for political, diplomatic or commercial purposes. Such a condition to some degree gives them creative spaces and creative freedom. However, this community is unable to effectively gather and emit their voices due to their lack of professional organisation, social resources and forces, resulting in feeble discursive power and limited social impact. From this perspective, this event is very likely to stimulate self-empowerment and self-entertainment of the folk heritage participants. The next section further discusses this issue.

6.3.3 Treatment

> 'We awarded an honorary certificate to every awardee. The significance of the event is that we finally brought together a large number of independent folk Nüshu bearers through the Internet. But this event still has regrets. I deeply feel that our power is too weak, we are really tiny. The social impact of this event is also limited. These titles may also not

(be) that significant to the awardees. It can be said that this event just kept a temporary heat. In the future, it is predicted that these titles may be dispensable for them'. (Indigenous Nüshu Transmitter, Respondent 14, December 2019)

According to the organisers, these selected transmitters were awarded a certificate by the Organising Committee of this event to recognise their competence and quality in Nüshu heritage practices. At the beginning of the event, the organisers tried to recruit sponsors through the Internet to provide a higher-budget awarding process to the folk transmitters, such as awarding trophies and plaques (similar to the official authentication process). However, as there were not enough sponsors, the certification for the folk winners was only presented on a piece of paper. It was demonstrated that even though the folk heritage group desires their heritage identity to be valued and treated appropriately, a series of factors such as shortage of funds, organisation and management have prevented them from giving themselves a more impressive and generous heritage identity certification.

It can be seen from the follow-up impact of this event that although the folk Nüshu bearers gathered on their social media platforms, held activities to reinforce their heritage identity and interacted with each other, the situation of the folk heritage discourse could still not be improved enough to compete with the official heritage discourse. Such a weak position is manifested in the poor social influence and ineffective control of the folk heritage community over the heritage. The folk heritage community has yet to be empowered by the rules and laws of the authorities or to engage in or influence the official decision-making on the heritage. The event organiser reiterated that they are too powerless to bring about profound social impacts. Their imperceptible position makes it difficult for them to affect or change the development of the heritage.

Even though many folk Nüshu bearers were awarded a certificate, some interviewees stated that they hardly used these titles or had no reason to claim them. The certification issued and endorsed by an online folk heritage group may not have enough credibility

from the perspective of the general public. In other words, the results determined by the folk heritage community seem 'unauthoritative'. The outside audience may find it difficult to recognise the heritage identity and heritage competence of the folk heritage bearers. This is particularly the case when they are compared with a group of officially authenticated transmitters whose titles are endorsed by local, municipal, provincial or national heritage authorities. These official transmitters, who are packaged with strong political and economic resources, can always assert their identity as the heritage representatives on various cultural occasions while the folk transmitters have hardly any opportunities to present their heritage identity. These folk authenticated titles to them seem immaterial and gradually fade out from the public's minds.

This analysis demonstrates that some folk Nüshu participants have tried to establish a new order and class within the heritage community through democratic actions in their specific heritage social media groups in the hope that the heritage identity of the folk group can be reinforced and their status in the heritage community can be promoted. Such an identity negotiation reflects power negotiations and conflicts in Chinese ICH in which both the power of the folk heritage community and the official heritage discourse are involved.

6.4 Understanding the Folk, Democratic Heritage Discourse in Chinese ICH Nüshu

This section, from the perspective of identity, discourse and democratisation, explores the understanding of the folk democratic heritage discourse based on the data and analysis of this research. The characteristics of this discourse are demonstrated and its weaknesses and challenges are also pointed out.

6.4.1 Features of the Folk Heritage Identities

The heritage identity of the folk heritage community is the product of the construction of their discourse. Their identity is characterised by their language, behaviours, values, beliefs and symbols. To be more specific, these folk heritage participants were mostly

born in the indigenous world of Jiangyong and are now engaged in various social careers. The term 'cultural heritage' to them is a family memory or a continuation of local history that has never been a high-end artefact or the object of political or commercial drives. This group of participants is likely to retain the traditional customs and habits of their predecessors, recording the heritage knowledge in their plain language—which allows the readers understand the culture quickly, easily and completely—rather than packaging the heritage as a mystery or a 'gift'. Equality and mutual respect are the core moral values within the folk heritage group. The cultural identity of each Nüshu bearer must be recognised and hierarchy is intolerable in this discourse space. Therefore, this group does not have an absolute leadership or a supreme authority. For members of this group, heritage deserves truth, awe and respect, rather than treated as a resource to be materialised or manipulated.

The heritage practices of the folk heritage participants are unprompted, unrestrained and unmanipulated, with unconfined organisation. Specifically, they are rarely prescribed or engaged in the purposeful heritage practices of any heritage authorities, especially those with political, diplomatic or commercial ambitions. Their private heritage creations are less restricted and influenced by the heritage sectors. Nevertheless, the unstructured heritage actions may give rise to the unstable and uncertain heritage status of the folk participants, as well as the tenuous relationship among these participants, who are more likely to focus on their individual practices and disregard the value of their specific heritage community. This group is less likely to form a coalition and association to make themselves more socially and culturally influential, powerful or competitive.

The participants are not uninformed of their disadvantaged position when facing the institutional and hierarchical pressure from the official heritage discourse but have made many efforts to empower their heritage identity and the folk heritage discourse. They endeavour to be the content contributors for the folk heritage media online to make historical heritage memories from their family available and accessible and

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actively present their heritage skills and knowledge for cultural communication. They illustrate their lifetime heritage experience and continuously reinforce their values and views on heritage development. They authenticate representative folk heritage transmitters through netizen democratic elections in order to compete with the cool authentication of the heritage representatives by the authorities of Chinese ICH and break the hierarchical and authoritative Chinese 'authorised heritage discourse'. The empowerment of the self-identity of the folk heritage community is achieved, making their heritage identity visible, affirmed and perceivable by a broader audience. The Chinese folk heritage discourse in ICH and the identity-making of Chinese folk heritage participants have distinct democratic characteristics.

6.4.2 Growing Heritage Democratisation and Challenges

Since 2014, folk Nüshu heritage discourse with the characteristics of heritage democratisation has been established and grown rapidly. The heritage democratisation of this field is reflected in the following aspects. First is the way that representative folk heritage transmitters are self-nominated, selected and authenticated by open public voting through the Internet. Second is the way that this folk Nüshu discourse space maintains a principal spirit of equality and values mutual respect. In the folk heritage community, every bearer achieves respect, regardless of whether they are masters or newcomers; none of them are excluded from the community and hierarchy is unacceptable in this discourse. Third, all members have an equal right to engage in the organisation of the folk heritage space and contribute to decision making. Such a space has never been supported by the efforts of one or a few people. The thousands of posts on the online folk heritage platforms rely on the input and support of the folk heritage participants. Their contributions have enabled the preservation and dissemination of the cultural heritage practices and the memories of the most indigenous community, achieving the digital recording of both the heritage actors and actions of the ICH field. This kind of cultural communication, knowledge sharing and the right of the members

to add knowledge to their social media platform as a 'heritage database' shows that a grounded heritage democratisation is indeed happening in Chinese ICH field.

The significance of the heritage democratisation practices to the Nüshu field cannot be ignored. The folk actors and actions in Chinese ICH Nüshu integrate marginalised voices into the digital spaces of folk heritage discourse, providing 'a more open and democratic attitude to heritage' (Economou, 2016: 222). These participants are offered an opportunity to become the 'decoders' of Chinese heritage. They are able to manage heritage interpretation, express heritage values and create heritage experiences in their particular ways. Their heritage 'exhibitions' on Chinese social media platforms reduce the weight and authority of the Chinese institutional heritage management and governance system. The interactive content and collective traditional memories presented by the folk heritage participants in this exclusive discursive space are constantly transformed into the meta-history of the heritage, which means that these indigenous participants and their practices through the digital channels could become a part of the discipline of historiography of the heritage. In this process, the importance of the so-called authoritative heritage governors and the arbiters of heritage cool authenticity is largely weakened. Folk heritage participants are trying to return to their role as cultural arbiters. Smith's (2006) Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) identifies a dominant narrative connected to national and elite values that works to exclude non-expert views about the nature and meaning of heritage through emphasis of aesthetics, monumentality and 'grand' narrative. However, the heritage actions discussed in this research reflect a narrative dominated by the folk, non-expert, non-official Chinese heritage community that emphasises democratisation, autonomy, equality, mutual respect, sharing and grassroots expressions.

In the Nüshu field, people's actions under the folk heritage discourse manifests their challenges to the official heritage discourse under the Chinese four-layer hierarchical ICH management system. There has been an oppositional relationship between these two heritage discourses, with the folk heritage discourse always in a powerless position.

This disadvantaged position could be owing to the lack of operative and effective organisation and mobilisation capabilities of the community and the lack of funds, technology, media and various forms of resources. In contrast, the local heritage authorities are able to mobilise a variety of institutional and administrative resources. In the case of Nüshu, this study demonstrates that the heritage identity of the folk heritage participants is even stigmatised and some of the heritage activities that the folk heritage participants attempt to carry out are prevented from being held on some occasions. A more pessimistic view is that if the enthusiasm and persistence of the individual organisers of the folk heritage community are exhausted, the community will be on the verge of collapse, which will further exacerbate the isolation and marginalisation of the folk heritage discourse. Without the strength, vitality, creativity and vision from the folk heritage community, heritage may be 'ossified' within an institutional, elite-manipulated heritage supremacy.

6.5 Officialisation and Digitalisation Impacting on Nüshu Artistic Evolution

Currently, it is normally to observe in the Nüshu field that Nüshu cultural inheritance and dissemination are carried out under the dominance of the party and government, and Nüshu's writings are likely to reinforce national politics and ideology. The hierarchical system among the transmitter women subverts the equal sistership in history in the Nüshu community. The local governments try to turn Nüshu's cultural capital into economic capital, and the transmitters' writing ability became a tool for commercialisation, which completely undermines Nüshu's role as a female emotional communication tool in history.

On the other hand, a recent development is that some young girls began to imitate the historical Nüshu women to use Nüshu to build the form of emotional connection and friendship. They contact Nüshu transmitters via online and offline channels to help them or teach them to make 'Nüshu Sister Books' as a proof of their friendship and

sistership. This transformation benefits from the development of China's digital e-commerce. A new business form of Nüshu commercialisation can be realised.

The development of digitisation has had a great impact on the evolution of Nüshu art. First, the 'Nüshu Input Method' was developed, which means that computer users can type Nüshu by inputting Mandarin. Chromezh, the designer of 'Unicode Nüshu Input Method', is a student from the School of Computer Science of Wuhan University and likes linguistics. After knowing Nüshu when he was learning linguistics, he developed the Nüshu Input Method and shared it on the Internet for free. In addition, folk Nüshu technology amateurs have also developed an 'Online Nüshu Dictionary', which is an open source project produced by Nüshu coder's group on GitHub from 2018 to 2020. The knowledge of the online dictionary is from the *Nüshu Standard Scripts Dictionary* (in Chinese: 女书标准字字典) compiled by Gong Zhebing and Tang Gongwei. At present, it supports the conversion of 4200 Chinese characters to Nüshu scripts. In addition, this open source project also includes Nüshu Converter, Nüshu Scripts List and Nüshu Input Method. It is a comprehensive Nüshu searching website. The above digital technologies make Nüshu have new vitality in the digital community. For the learners of the Internet generation, these resources will be an effective tool for them to learn and inherit Nüshu language and culture.

The development of technology has brought a new way of knowledge storage, query and inheritance. Nüshu's way of emotional communication is also reborn with the development of digital technology, especially digital social media platform. In history, Nüshu transmission relied on face-to-face singing and handwritten letters among the female users. Today, some folk participants publish and share their creative contents through various online heritage communities on digital platforms.

> "My two life poems, 'Fascinating Nüshu' and 'Xiang Women', are shared on the 'Nüshu Transmitter WeChat Official Accounts'. I feel that we, as women in the new era, should not only inherit the wisdom of the older generation, but also inherit the essence of our generation, so that

Nüshu spirit will not die out" (Liao Xinxiu, spoke on Nüshu Transmitter WeChat Official Accounts).

The data demonstrates that folk Nüshu transmitters upload and publish their original Nüshu poetry works by the use of digital platforms. In contemporary Nüshu creation, the content no longer tends to express women's difficult and unsatisfactory situation in a depressed society as in historical works, but pays attention to how contemporary Nüshu's works convey Jiangyong women's wisdom of facing and challenging life, and is committed to making Nüshu's women's spirit of diligence, thrift, softness, tenacity, forbearance, expressiveness, excellence and love spread in China.

6.6 The Democratic Potential of Social Media for Heritage-Making Since 2020s

The practice and development prospects of social networking technology and its open concepts allow more and more citizens to participate in the political, cultural, and economic activities on the Internet. For cultural heritage practitioners, online spaces create opportunities for official and unofficial heritage activities.

The practices of official heritage practitioners using social media reflects a certain degree of democratic potential and challenges. With the rapid development of China's new media platforms, short video platforms such as Douyin (in Chinese: 抖音) and Kuaishou (in Chinese: 快手) have replaced WeChat as the most popular digital social media platform in China. The space for Nüshu inheritors to use social media for heritage practice has also been further expanded. Based on their greater political and cultural influence, some official heritage practitioners and inheritors have begun to open personal Nüshu-themed accounts on platforms such as Douyin to publish relevant user-generated content (UGC).

Since the first short video was released on April 18, 2019, the Douyin account 'Nüshu Chuanren Hu Xin (in Chinese: 女书传人胡欣)' opened by the officially designated transmitter has accumulated 2,203 followers, 104 short videos, and has received 15,000 'likes' from the audience. The Douyin account 'Nüshu: Pu Lijuan Nüshu Academy (in

Chinese: 女书蒲丽娟女书院)' opened by officially designated transmitter Mrs. Pu Lijuan has been updated since February 5, 2019. It has released 157 short videos, accumulated 1,873 follows and gained 18,000 likes. The officially authorised 'Nüshu Promotion Ambassador' Chen Lixin began to publish short video works on Douyin since August 10, 2019. A total of 498 works have been released, 2,197 followers have been accumulated, and 5,896 likes have been obtained (The above data gained on August 14, 2021).

The researcher observed that the short videos posted by these heritage participants on Douyin were mainly on the following topics: spreading Nüshu knowledge and customs, practicing Nüshu calligraphy, displaying Nüshu calligraphy products, displaying Nüshu cultural and creative products, participating in Nüshu inheritance activities organised by official organisations, showing the daily work of the Nüshu Museum, showing the sceneries of the Nüshu Museum and the indigenous village, sharing the blessings written by Nüshu, showing the interactions between Nüshu inheritors, showing the writings of personal interests (such as writing Buddhist scriptures in Nüshu), recording Nüshu's educational activities in elementary schools, middle schools and universities, promoting the other local tourism resources in Jiangyong, presenting the interactions between Nüshu cultural heritage and other heritage projects, promoting the local specialties and so on.

The contents released by these practitioners tend to reflect and promote the cultural governance paradigm of the Chinese authorities, showing a positive social orientation and reflecting contemporary Chinese political and cultural values. Some videos reflect obvious political inclination. For example, as the official heritage inheritor and propaganda ambassador, the producers of the short video on Douyin uses Nüshu to write the national 'positive energy' content, such as contents about the 'May 4th Youth Day' labelled 'Youth strives for the party to make the country strong'. May 4th Youth Day is a holiday established to commemorate the 1919 May Fourth Movement which

was a Chinese anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement promoted the birth of Chinese communism. Some official heritage inheritors on Douyin publish 'Singing a Folk Song for the Party' in Nüshu and video cuts recording their performance of Nüshu traditional songs on the concert to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in July 2021.

However, on the other hand, this latest form of digital social media is rarely adopted by unofficial heritage participants. A large number of folk heritage participants still rely on WeChat platforms, such as the WeChat groups of folk participants, and the WeChat Official Account operated by them as a space for sharing knowledge and information. One of the latest developments in 2021 is that a folk Nüshu knowledge transmission platform was established by several senior folk Nüshu scholars through a WeChat group. The online community is called 'Nüshu Forum (in Chinese: 女书讲坛)', and its main purpose is to attract Nüshu learners and enthusiasts who find it difficult to access channels of learning Nüshu to join the online community and teach them Nüshu knowledge for free. The community organisers regularly provide free WeChat Nüshu courses in the online group. As of August 2021, this community has assembled 181 people. Usually, the organisers teach courses by sending WeChat voice messages to the group members. Courses are often arranged in the evening or during the weekends, so that learners of various occupations can attend. Text messages and handwritten pictures of Nüshu are used as lecture notes. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the free Nüshu courses, group members are required by the group manager who is the Nüshu lecturer to hand in homework after each course. Assignments are often photos practicing Nüshu scripts taken by the group members. The lecturer often provides feedback and comments on each assignment. In addition, the community often shares folk Nüshu participants' 'original' singing Nüshu works and videos about local Nüshu cultural practices. The audience for this kind of education and knowledge sharing is the heritage participants in the folk heritage social media community. This kind of dissemination of knowledge and culture holds explicit targets and influences targeted audience, which

can form an effective cultural heritage dissemination and inheritance effect within the grassroots heritage community.

The main reason why folk heritage participants are not inclined to use short video social media such as Douyin is that these participants have formed member gatherings through WeChat communities, and these online communities pay more attention to the interaction and sharing between the members. The organisers play a key role in operating and maintaining the order of the community. They encourage or guide group members to participate in or create discussions and knowledge contributions on certain heritage topics. On this basis, any participant in the community can become content contributors and expressers. In other words, the UGC in these folk online communities comes from the contributions of a variety of users. Such a 'multi-member contribution' method is obviously different from the way that the Nüshu accounts on Douyin relying on individual contributions. Further, the heritage-related practices of the official heritage participants on Douyin are more likely to be a showcase performance of a mixture of official and personal values, while the practices of non-official heritage participants on the WeChat communities tend to be a manifestation of the folk participants' grassroots heritage independence consciousness, autonomy, and a collection of folk democratic heritage discourse.

In general, both official and unofficial heritage participants seek out suitable digital media for the dissemination, publicity and inheritance of cultural heritage through their own methods. Different ways show the democratic potential of different digital social media for heritage and different characteristics of democratic potential.

6.7 Conclusion

To address Research Question 2.2, which focuses on the construction of the folk heritage discourse in Nüshu, this chapter further discusses the heritage-making of the folk heritage community and their process of constructing and improving their heritage

identity and discourse via new media channels. This chapter also illustrates the democratic aspect of the folk heritage discourse in Chinese ICH Nüshu that benefits from Internet Age technology. The analysis shows that the process of the hot authentication of the folk heritage community is reinforced and improved through the implementation of digital methods. In the context of contemporary China, heritage-making has become a competition in terms of discourse, identity, resources and industry among different parties of heritage participants. Chapter Four has pointed out that the development of official heritage discourse has obvious hierarchical and authoritative features. China's top-down heritage governance model excludes folk heritage participants from decision-making. The study demonstrates that digital openness makes it possible for cultural heritage to gain more social influence and visibility in cyberspace. Based on various open and participatory heritage networks, heritage participants, especially those from the indigenous communities, have gained a space to explicate and inherit traditional knowledge.

This research finds that digital social media impacts heritage participants' self-representation, identity-making and brand-making. Digital channels give folk heritage participants the opportunity to achieve online democratic elections. The hot authentication procedures of the folk heritage community, to some extent, represent the features of cool authentication. The democratic election of transmitters in the folk heritage community is a process in which participants construct and reconstruct their heritage identities, as well as a process of claiming authenticity. These democratic practices have resulted in inclusivity, exclusivity and disputes about 'otherness', which reflects the power conflicts involving the manipulation of the heritage community.

This study further suggests that heritage practice in the Digital Age is becoming more and more anti-elitist (Witcomb, 2007; Bachi et al., 2014; Gaitan, 2014; Silberman and Purser, 2012). The establishment of folk heritage discourse meant that the heritage participants without authoritative resources could still deal with the monopoly and hegemony of the authoritative heritage institutions in heritage discourse, authorised-

identity, cultural resources and cultural industry. The construction of the folk heritage discourse could prevent cultural heritage from becoming solely the product of the national authoritative heritage products and fossils. Social networks could help achieve goals such as knowledge sharing, retention and discussion. Through a few special discourse spaces on new media, folk heritage bearers reclaim the representation and reconstruction of their historical memories and traditions. They are no longer being excluded from the history of the heritage, but actively participating in its contemporary process to maintain a 'living heritage system' (Liu, 2010: 2976). Their content on the new media collecting participatory discussions and ideas constitute a distinctive documentation and trace of contemporary heritage. If this content can be preserved, it will become 'an important source of knowledge for future generations' (UNESCO, 2016: 4).

The analysis also suggests that the rise of China's Internet and social media has gradually broken the long-term official monopolisation of heritage discourse. Based on open access and information freedom, the connection between digitalisation and democracy is becoming increasingly obvious. Heritage participants actively employ various online platforms to form a cluster of bearers. They collect, represent and preserve the heritage from the perspective of the indigenous community via these platforms. They granted their own Representative Transmitters, realising the public selection and folk empowerment of their heritage identity. This reflects a 'significant democratisation effect' (Besser, 1997: 118) and a bottom-up approach to heritage. The explanation of heritage practices from indigenous heritage communities can be perceived. The voices, opinions, values and beliefs of folk heritage participants are expressed, transforming them from indiscernible to discernible.

Although the folk heritage participants have strengthened their identity-making and their own heritage discourse through these democratic practices, their weaknesses in the lack of economic, political and social capital and the lack of organisation are still

obvious, meaning they are always at a disadvantage in the competition against the official heritage discourse.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter first summarises what this study has accomplished and then answers the research questions. The theoretical and methodological innovations and contributions of this research are explained. Some policy recommendations related to Chinese ICH governance are put forward. Finally, this chapter reflects on the limitations of this research and provides some suggestions for future critical heritage studies in the Chinese context.

7.1 Achievements of this Research

This study examines the development and transformation of Nüshu in the context of contemporary China, which demonstrates the 'heritagisation' (Svensson and Maags, 2018; Chan, 2018; Shepherd and Yu, 2013; Smith and Akagawa, 2008) of a Chinese intangible heritage. This is heritage research and a cultural study in the Chinese context from a critical, sociological perspective. It examines theories in critical heritage research, identity-making in heritage and the construction of heritage discourses.

In the past 30 years, the scholarship has investigated the Chinese culture of 'Nüshu' from the perspectives of linguistics, history, gender and so forth and have produced astonishing outcomes. On the basis of the preceding studies, this research, taking into account the tremendous changes in politics, economy, culture and society in China in the past three decades, aims to scrutinise the laws of transformation of this heritage from the perspective of critical sociology and critical discourse. This research focuses on the social changes of a Chinese ICH project during the process of heritage globalisation and institutionalisation under the scheme of UNESCO global heritage protection and governance as well as the Chinese four-level national heritage system. This research not only explores what the participants in this heritage community have done or thought, but reflects in what historical period, in what social background and for what purposes they accomplish their heritage practices. What this research hopes to uncover are the heritage discourses that the heritage participants yield and how their

heritage identity is embodied in the discourses. This study, taking a Chinese ICH as the observation object, gains insights into contemporary Chinese heritage politics.

The research questions in this study focus on how the heritage discourse and identity-making of participants are represented in the Nüshu ICH community and the features of each discourse. Another focus is on the ways that different heritage discourses and identities are legitimated by the actors from official and non-official heritage communities. Based on the detailed analysis in the dissertation, these questions can be answered.

This study demonstrates that there are two explicit heritage discourses in the Chinese ICH Nüshu community, namely the official heritage discourse and the folk heritage discourse. This study argues that there is an official heritage discourse in China and in the ICH Nüshu community with hierarchical, authoritative political-economic oriented features. The discourse is constructed and reinforced through a series of 'cool' authentication mechanisms within a 'four-level' hierarchical heritage management system from national to county levels along with the Chinese *tizhi* institution, which defines different official personnel identities. The implementation of China's authorised heritage discourse at the local level is approaching a local heritage authoritarianism whose purpose is not only to monopolise the local cool authentication of transmitters and the interpretation of heritage authenticity, but also the ownership and property of the local heritage, in order to play the leading role in heritage industry development.

On the other hand, this study investigates another essential heritage discourse, namely the folk heritage discourse in the ICH Nüshu community, with its digital, open and democratic features. The folk heritage discourse is constructed based on Chinese social media platforms. With various open and participatory heritage networks, heritage participants, especially those from the indigenous communities, have gained a space to explicate and inherit traditional knowledge, which impacts their self-representation on

social media and in heritage brand-making. Digital channels give folk heritage participants the opportunity to conduct online democratic elections, showing the hot authentication of heritage in online Chinese ICH field. Such a hot authentication is participatory and communal, illustrating the subjective authenticity of ICH by its heritage participants. The democratic election of transmitters in the folk heritage community is a process in which participants construct, reconstruct and improve their heritage identities. It is believed that Chinese heritage practice in the Digital Age is becoming more and more anti-elitist and is breaking the long-term official monopolisation of heritage discourse.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study provides insights into Chinese society, culture and political structure by exploring the changes of an ICH while considering the heritage politics in the contemporary Chinese context. This research has developed a 'discursive method for heritage research' (Wu and Hou, 2015), comprehending heritage with Foucault's arguments' around discourse, power and knowledge (Foucault, 2010; 1991; 1979; 1978) and a constructive identity-making angle (Block, 2007; Tilly, 2002; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Cerulo, 1997; Hall, 1992; Anderson, 1991). From a top-down viewpoint, this study investigates the practice of the official heritage discourse in the Nüshu heritage community, and, from a bottom-up perspective, explores the actions of the folk heritage discourse in this community. This reveals the negotiations on authenticity interpretation, ownership of property rights and legitimate identity of the heritage between the two discourse communities. The official and folk heritage discourses within the Nüshu community have become spaces for participants to argue their heritage identities. These two heritage discourse systems echo their respective formulas of heritage expression, preservation, memory and reconstruction. Specific discourse rules (Olsson, 2010; Foucault, 1978; 1972) in heritage expression have been created by these systems correspondingly. These rules are used to support the legitimacy of their statements in heritage discourse and identity-making. The current

Nüshu heritage community also witnesses two 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1991) in heritage by the official and folk heritage discourse, which express respective statements on the 'authentic' or 'false' heritage and the means to recognise their discourse. Both of these heritage discourses endeavour to establish their own organism of heritage authenticity to empower their heritage expression and knowledge.

This study develops a case of making AHD in contemporary China (Wu, 2012; Wu and Song, 2012; Zhang and Wu, 2016; Svensson and Maags, 2018; Su, Song and Sigley, 2019). This case reflects how China, from its national to local level, has settled its own AHD structure. At the national level, a set of rules and laws of heritage suitable for the current social and historical progress and setting has been established by the state. In Chinese heritage governance, heritage authorities empower representatives to manifest the officially termed identities, values and ideologies in heritage. The heritage projects and participants authorised by authorities can receive considerably more political favouritism than the unauthorised ones. Authorised individuals and institutions assume the legitimacy of heritage practice and the advantageous, influential positions, while most normal participants are relegated and excluded by the official discourse.

This research has developed relevant theories regarding the authenticity of ICH (Chhabra, 2019; Su, 2018; Deacon and Smeets, 2013; Paddock and Schofield, 2017; Hu, Feng and Zhang, 2015; Lixinski, 2014). Through long-term observation of the Nüshu community, it can be revealed that the local heritage authorities are attempting to monopolise the authenticity interpretation of the heritage through a series of governance mechanisms, such as the nomination of heritage representatives, the promulgation of laws and regulations and the designation of management institutions. The purpose of the official heritage discourse is to occupy the power and legitimacy of the authenticity interpretation of the heritage and the application of the heritage resources. The authenticity interpretation of ICH in the discourse of the heritage authorities and their elites is still vague. The 'standard' of ICH that they claim has not yet reached a consensus, even among the authorised heritage representatives who are

considered the 'orthodox' of the heritage. However, a series of authentication mechanisms have legally designated these representatives as the legal interpreters of the authenticity of ICH. On the other hand, heritage authorities, through registering heritage trademarks worldwide and nationwide, attempt to monopolise their ownership of the heritage brand. The purpose of such monopolistic possession of trademarks is to establish and develop the so-called 'heritage IP' and benefit from the exploitation of heritage resources. These officially authorised heritage spokespersons are given the right to legally use these trademarks in specific heritage practices, while other heritage participants' use of the heritage trademarks is deemed illegal. Heritage authorities often negotiate heritage authenticity in an institutional and formal way. The establishment and development of a country's top-down heritage discourse in China embodies how the Western authorised heritage discourse affects China's local heritage practices. The official heritage discourse in China is now used for national development involving economic, political, diplomatic, cultural and social aspects and dominates the heritage practices nationwide.

This study holds that the discourse space impulsively established by folk participants can, to a certain extent, challenge the national discourse. The platforms founded by the grassroots deserve further academic and social attention and discussion. This research develops theories about the participatory practices of heritage in the Digital Age (Liu, S. B 2010; Tayloy and Gibson, 2017; Brown and Nicholas, 2012; Stuedahl and Mörtberg, 2012; Giaccardi, 2012; Witcomb, 2007; Coombe and Herman, 2004). It further progresses the viewpoints concerning Nüshu's new media exercises (Tan, 2017; 2015; Luo, 2013). In recent years, the explosive expansion of online platforms and social media in China has given ordinary individuals an equitable and accessible cosmos for discursive expression. The openness of online platform participation acknowledges heritage participants, with their cultural capital, to become content contributors on social media. They are given opportunities to create their own social networks for heritage expression and trigger social-cultural impacts. The grassroots

from indigenous communities are given access to an inclusive space where they can define, depict and diffuse their heritage knowledge in cyberspace. They can achieve group congregation, interaction and heritage knowledge sharing, safeguarding and dialogue on various online social media platforms. These platforms are channels for heritage participants to accomplish their heritage identity-making and personal brand-building. The heritage practices via online participation represent the recognisable characteristics of anti-elitism, as the expansion of online platforms relies heavily on the participation of the mass public. The influence of the few cultural and political elites in heritage is likely to be weakened. It is worth emphasising that the actions and practices of the heritage grassroots are spontaneous. The continuity of their heritage practices stems from their acknowledgement and perception of the values of the heritage, rather than being manipulated by peripheral, social-political strengths. The heritage practices on online participatory platforms demonstrates the connotation of digital measures to the constructive vitality of heritage. The function of social media in heritage communities plays an imperative role in maintaining a living heritage system so as to prevent heritage from becoming rigid due to the governance, planning and manipulation of the heritage authorities. Folk heritage participants are deconstructing the heritage hegemony of the authorities through the spatial emancipation of the Internet. The content contributed by the grassroots is making the representation of heritage increasingly diversified.

This research verifies the democratisation in heritage practices (Brown and Nicholas, 2012) in the Internet era in China, even if it faces challenges. This research evidences the challenges and negotiations by a bottom-up, social media community-based folk heritage discourse against the official heritage discourse. An election for appointing a group of folk heritage representatives was organised and carried out by the grassroots on the Internet. Several indigenous representatives were accredited by a wide range of folk practitioners within its own discourse, thereby diluting the social-political identity privilege of the officially designated heritage representatives. This phenomenon shows

the rules from the 'bottom' of the heritage community. In the online spaces, the grassroots are dedicated to competing with the hegemonic discourse of the authorities to regain their influence in managing the heritage. In the Chinese heritage field, undoubtedly, the influence from above presents a challenge, but heritages would hardly remain conquered by the unitary command of the state. The grassroots and the indigenous communities stress their identity as the heirs and custodians of their heritage knowledge in digital communal spaces, which reflects the connection between social media platforms and the democratic expression of participants. Essentially, folk heritage participants cultivate their own platforms for intelligent and valuable conversation, foster paradigms of heritage exercises and resist the authorities' domination of heritage resources, governance and version of authenticity.

In general, this research reveals the official and folk heritage discourses that have emerged in the socialist heritage scheme in China in the context of the global heritage boom and the rapid economic growth of China. This study evidences diverse ways of constructing heritage. Within the scope of CHS, Nüshu research in this thesis is combined with heritage communities, indigenous memory, heritage governance and planning. Behind each heritage discourse exists a power network. The social-political influence of participants is reached through their exercise of heritage discourse. By clarifying the collaborating connections between discourse and power, the construction of the social order in a particular heritage community can be revealed. The identity-making of heritage participants is realised through their handling of the heritage discourse they stand on. Heritage identity-making is a product of power and knowledge. The moulding of heritage identity is a self-motivated progression that is echoed in the communications of a specific heritage discourse. Today, the representations of heritage that the public can witness are hardly historical but contemporary, formed by various social-political forces. This study suggests paying more attention to the hegemonic discourse in heritages. The formation of supremacy does not merely originate from the

overhead authority's heritage discourse, but also from the grassroots, the indigenous heritage communities, in a bottom-up modus.

7.3 Methodological Contributions

In terms of methodological contributions, this research combines critical heritage studies (CHS), digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA) and demonstrates the rationality of the combination. It develops qualitative research methods in CHS, especially in online qualitative data collection. This study absorbs and progresses preceding research of digital ethnographers (such as Bluteau, 2019; Caliandro, 2018; Pink et al., 2015; Boyd, 2015; Postill and Pink, 2012; Kelty, 2008; Wilson, 2006; Muñiz and Schau, 2005; Gatson and Zweerink, 2004; Leander and McKim, 2003). It obtained data by observing Nüshu's online heritage communities for more than three years. This study suggests that online ethnography sites need to be examined intentionally. For choosing appropriate sites, this study advocates that researchers focus on the following facets: 1. The interactions, dialogues and social relationships among the participants. 2. The heritage activities and members' participation on these online networks. 3. The content published and shared by the participants on the platforms. This study suggests that digital ethnography in heritage research demands that researchers monitor for regular updates of the selected sites and record important information at all times, such as the texts, dialogues, disputes and images on these sites. In addition, it is also recommended that the sites that are selected (the secondary sites) are also checked regularly. The information from the secondary sites can be associated with the information from the primary sites so as to establish a substantial, plentiful, multi-dimensional online ethnography observation database.

This study critically reflects the implications of digital ethnography for heritage research. The gain of this technique lies in that social researchers can carry out long-lasting observation of online heritage communities, participants and practices. Compared with traditional, grounded ethnographic procedures, digital ethnography is

visibly more cost-effective. The anonymous characteristics of social media allow researchers to obtain more critical data from the participants. In addition, digital ethnography could help researchers gather data efficiently. Researchers, through digital platforms, can directly get in touch with the observed individuals. That is to say, interviewers for qualitative research are more easily contacted with the assistance of digital techniques.

However, one of the limitations of (qualitative) digital ethnography lies in that the range of sampling may be limited, that is, the researcher may focus on the happenings in a few selected sites but the unselected ones may be ignored. In addition, the source of participants may be narrowed due to people's different access to digital technology and devices, such as the aging people who seldom use digital devices and those who cannot afford digital devices. Another question should be noted that the reliability of online interactions due to lack of verifiability of identities. Participants may not have the demographic information they say they do, even if those managing the group claim to have authenticated them. Therefore, this study suggests that the combination of online and offline ethnographic methods would be an applicable choice for heritage researchers.

This study further develops CDA in CHS in terms of data analysis. It investigates the research questions under the guidance of the CDA techniques, concentrating on the social power relationship within the heritage community in the dominance, control, discrimination and marginalisation encountered by different heritage discourse. The application of CDA in this study supplements studies in Chinese heritage discourse. This study particularly deliberates on how participants talk about or communicate heritage production, how they represent the heritage domain in which they live, and how they understand their social and personal identity through their actions. Van Dijk's CDA ideas remind this study to understand the rapport among the discourse, power, authority and social inequality in the Nüshu heritage community. Heritage researchers in CDA are explicitly advised to focus on how political and cultural elites and power

institutions/groups cause social inequality, especially structured, institutionalised dominance, the hierarchy of power in a specific community, as well as the inclusion and exclusion of participants in heritage communities.

Different discourse categories contain different behavioural mediators, patterns, power and domination and conflicts. This research observed the folk heritage discourse and official heritage discourse in the Nüshu heritage community through such a step. Then, heritage researchers can analyse the discursive strategies perceived in distinct categories, paying particular attention to the tactics that legitimise discourse. When probing the language use in discourse, heritage researchers can scrutinise issues such as the dominant and the dominated, hegemony and legalisation. In this process, power struggles and hierarchical systems within the heritage community can be revealed. Researchers could investigate whether heritage participants practise rhetorical mechanisms such as allegories, metaphors, similes, idioms and proverbs to construct value and whether their language implies identity distinctions, such as the use of words 'our', 'their' and 'other' to bolster the opposition between heritage identities and discourses. After acquiring the stances of different utterers, researchers can further consider what social factors are related to the participants' meaningful language expressions and treat heritage discourse as a social practice. For example, in contemporary CHS, researchers can consider factors such as local heritage strategies, local authority mechanisms and participants' economic settings and social affiliations. The purpose of this step is to uphold the perceptions of the multifaceted social issues, relationship issues and identity issues in heritage research.

In general, this study uses a variety of qualitative methods including online and offline ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews and CDA to achieve demonstrative, dynamic and rigorous visions from various heritage participants in various heritage discourses so as to illustrate the identity-making and heritage-making in the context of contemporary China. The comprehensive qualitative methods used in this study could

enrich the methodology of heritage research in support of future CHS on China's heritage communities and heritage discourse.

7.4 Policy Recommendations

China has enacted specific laws for heritage safeguarding, such as *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China* (2011) at the national level. A series of implementation methods have also been promulgated in various provinces based on the national laws and regulations, such as *Hunan Province's implementation of the intangible cultural heritage law of the People's Republic of China* (2016). However, this study finds that heritage authorities at the local level, to a large extent, have been the arbitrators determining the progress of China's heritages. Since the 2000s, local authorities have received increasing funds and autonomy to decide the progress of local heritages. Some of the authorities seem not to focus on the preservation of the heritage itself (such as its knowledge records, relics and historical remains) and the heritage participants (including official and unofficial heritage transmitters), but are more interested in exploiting the economic benefits of heritage, such as heritage tourism, cultural creative industries and infrastructure construction on behalf of local heritage development, to improve local economy.

Today, Nüshu is in a danger of fossilisation and some of the folk participants seem distrustful of the actions of the local heritage authorities. Some of them have shown a desperate attitude towards this heritage. It is suggested in this thesis that the local heritage authorities should not continuously 'compete' with the participants from the grassroots in heritage utilisation, interpretation, ownership, as well as construction. More acknowledgement, attention and opportunities should be given to the heritage grassroots in China's ICH. The local heritage authorities should realise their position as policy makers and implementers rather than market competitors. They should cease to hinder or stigmatise the heritage practices of the majority of the folk heritage participants, especially their cultural exchange activities and heritage commercial

activities. There should be less boundaries in collaboration between the authorised and unauthorised heritage participants. In this way, the interactions among all Nüshu participants can be motivated so as to safeguard the vitality of Nüshu as an ICH in contemporary China. The hierarchical system of the ICH Representative Transmitters from the county level to the national level in China should be reconsidered. The linkage between heritage transmitters from various backgrounds should not be widened only by rules and laws of the executive forces. A more democratic, flexible, motivative and grounded way of selecting representative heritage transmitters is advocated to be adopted. Heritage bearers with great recognition from the grassroots, indigenous heritage communities deserve more public and official attention.

Based on the analysis and conclusions of this thesis and inspired by the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions promulgated by UNESCO in 2005, feasible cultural policy suggestions that this research can put forward is that the field of Chinese intangible cultural heritage needs to issue government actions, laws and programs to ensure the freedom of cultural expression and ideas of all cultural participants in participation in intangible cultural heritage. These not only include individuals and institutions recognised by state agencies, but also civil actors and civil society, private actors such as cultural enterprises and industries (especially in developing regions) and minorities and indigenous peoples. Several specific groups such as women, indigenous peoples, minorities and artists and practitioners of developing regions need to be empowered or given financial assistance for improving their cultural expression. More specifically, for China's ICH projects, more policies and financial assistance need to cover and improve the heritage-practising capabilities of the unofficially authorised heritage participants and the indigenous communities.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this study lies in the scope and scale of the samples. First of all, this study conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with all the official Nüshu transmitters and also interviewed a number of heritage participants from the folk, indigenous community. However, due to the substantial number of people in the folk heritage community, this study only selected the few most active and well-known members of this group as the interviewees. Future Nüshu research can further supplement the focus and discussion on the folk heritage group through focus groups and questionnaires. Secondly, this study did not obtain enough responses from the local official heritage governors. In seeking interviewees, the researcher was rejected by the local heritage governors many times and ultimately only three relevant heritage governors were interviewed. It seems that some local officials are very wary of researchers from overseas institutions. Therefore, data from local heritage authorities may be limited to some extent. In order to remedy this limitation, this study obtained such data from other information channels, such as the speeches of local officials on social media and official reports on local governmental websites. This thesis suggests that, in the research design, CHS in Chinese contexts need to consider the accessibility to Chinese heritage authorities.

This study is one of the cases enriching China's Critical Heritage Research (CHS) and provides some reflective views for the CHS field. It focuses on the heritage-making process of Nüshu as a single case. However, some of the proposed discussions may not be adapted to other ICH fields due to the lack of a comparative study with other ICH cases. This thesis suggests that critical heritage researchers worldwide can carry out comparative studies on the 'heritagisation' of multiple heritage communities in future research. In the future, heritage scholars, anthropologists and sociologists are advised to further develop CHS in the Chinese context and explore more extensive heritage projects and communities. Scholars are advised to link the macro perspectives of heritage globalisation, nationalisation, institutionalisation and cultural heritage industrialisation in the analysis and take root in the indigenous heritage communities,

especially focusing on the contemporary heritage practices, expressions, discourses, identities and resistance of indigenous heritage participants and communities. On this basis, a systematic Chinese CHS paradigm with rich theoretical and methodological contributions may be conceptualised in the future.

Heritage researchers are advised to further investigate the marginalised and powerless groups in heritage, critically view heritage decision-making and governance and any actions embedded in nationalisation, especially monopoly and hegemony. Heritage scholars can further investigate the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage, especially the expressions and debates on ICH authenticity by heritage participants. In addition, this thesis suggests that heritage researchers consider the impact of the extensive application of social media on heritage participants and heritage communities. Scholars can further enrich their understanding of the democratisation of heritage in the Digital Age. This study suggests that this can be one of the key topics of CHS in the 2020s. Finally, this thesis suggests that heritage scholars consider digital ethnography as a research method in CHS and combine CHS, CDA and digital ethnography to further enrich the theories in the academic field. Ultimately, this study encourages heritage researchers to refer to the methodological and theoretical developments of this study in order to contribute more complex interdisciplinary heritage studies.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Consent Form for Interviews

<div align="center">

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

采访同意书

</div>

Project Title: "Identity-Making of Participants and Discourse Construction in the Nüshu Cultural Community Based on Critical Discourse Analysis."

项目名称"基于批判话语分析的女书文化社区参与者的身份变迁研究和话语构建的研究"

Researcher's Name: Xihuan Hu from the University of Leicester School of Arts

研究者：胡曦幻 莱斯特大学

Research Background and Research Purpose

研究背景和目的

The doctoral research is to investigate the identity transformation of the participants in Nüshu cultural community by qualitative methods.

此博士研究课题旨在通过定性研究方法，了解女书文化社区参与者的身份变迁

Please tick the appropriate boxes 请在相应的框中打勾	Yes 是	No 否
Taking Part		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY. 我已经知情本研究的项目信息		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. 我愿意回答关于本项目的采访问题		
I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio or video)a 我愿意以被采访的方式参与本项目，采访内容将会录音或录像		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part. 我的参与是自愿的。我可以在任何时候退出本研究而不需要理由		
Use of the information I provide for this project only 在本研究中对我提供的信息的使用		

I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project. 我已知情我的个人信息如电话和地址不会被泄露		
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. 我已知情我在采访中的话语可能会被出版物、报告、网站和其他研究成果引用		
Please choose one of the following two options: 请选择下列两项中的一项		
I would like my real name used in the above 我希望在上述研究成果中出现我的真实姓名		
I would not like my real name to be used in the above. 我不希望在上述研究成果中出现我的真实姓名		
Use of the information I provide beyond this project 在本研究外对我提供信息的使用		
I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the audio recording device and be transcribed b 我同意我提供的信息以录方式保存，并且被转录		
I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. 我已知情其他研究者只有在同意本知情同意书的保密要求下，才能获得这些数据		
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. 我已知情其他研究者只有在同意本知情同意书的保密要求下，才能在出版物、报告、网页，以及其他研究成果中使用我的话语		
So we can use the information you provide legally 我们能合法地使用您提供的信息		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Xihuan Hu. 我同意将我持有的与本项目相关的任何材料的版权授予研究者 Xihuan Hu		

Name of participant 参与者姓名	Researcher 研究者姓名

Signature 签名	Signature 签名
Date 日期	Date 日期

If you would like to receive a summary of the results when the study is complete please provide your email address

如果您希望在研究完成后收到结果摘要，请提供您的电子邮件地址:

_____

This study was reviewed by the University of Leicester Psychology Research Ethics Committee (PREC). You may contact the Chair of PREC Professor Panos Vostanis at pv11@le.ac.uk if you have any questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this project.

这项研究由莱斯特大学心理学研究伦理委员会（PREC）审查。 如果您对本项目的道德操守有任何问题或疑虑，请联系 PREC 帕约斯沃斯塔尼斯教授的主席 pv11@le.ac.uk。

Project contact details for further information

项目联系方式了解更多信息

Nama 姓名: Xihuan Hu

Phone 电话: +44 07422934295

Address 地址: University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, Le1 7rh

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

参与者信息表

Research Project Title

研究项目名称

Identity-Making of Participants and Discourse Construction in the Nüshu Cultural Community Based on Critical Discourse Analysis.

基于批判话语分析的女书文化社区参与者的身份变迁研究和话语构建的研究

Invitation

邀请

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

你被邀请参加这个研究项目。在你决定这么做之前，重要的是你要明白为什么研究正在完成以及它将涉及什么。如果您愿意，请花时间仔细阅读以下信息并与他人讨论。询问我们是否有任何不清楚的内容，或者是否需要更多信息。花些时间来决定你是否愿意参加。谢谢您阅读此篇。

3. What is the project's purpose? 该项目的目的是什么？

In brief, the author has divided the participants who are involved in the Nüshu culture's heritage, dissemination, and protection into four categories: Nüshu cultural bearers, government custodians, cultural practitioners (media and economics), and researchers. A socially interactive community composed of these group participants based on the Nüshu culture is regarded as a Nüshu cultural community. Since the founding of PRC, the development of the Nüshu cultural community has experienced different historical periods. Particularly since the 1980s, the value of Nüshu has been re-examined and recognised by the scholars. In 2006 Nüshu successfully listed into the national ICH list. It's still trying to gain more promotion and to be more international. In different historical stages, members and groups within the Nüshu cultural community play their different social roles and undertake different responsibilities. The role of each group is never constant but it is changing and reshaping with social transformation. This change

will not stop. The purpose of this study is to explore the views of members of the community on their own social identity changes. How do they view their past and present social roles? How do they look forward to the future's social roles and the development of the Nüshu cultural community? How does each group interact? Through literature reading, interviews, and participant observations, we can obtain a macro-level understanding of the transformation of the Nüshu cultural community, and build and develop the concept of Cultural Community. Under the framework of knowledge of social identity theory and identity change theory, who do participants feel their transformation of social roles and social interaction? So that the prospect of the Nüshu cultural community can be put forward, measures to protect and develop the community can be designed.

简单来说，作者将参与女书文化传承、传播和保护的参与者分为四大类，包括女书文化拥有者、政府管理者、文化从业者（媒体和经济）、以及学者群体。以女书文化为根基，将这些群体参与者组成的一个社会交际社区视为女书文化社区。自建国以来女书文化社区的发展经历了不同的历史时期，尤其是80年代后，女书的价值被外界重新发掘和认识。2006年女书成功入列国家级非物质文化遗产，并且尝试走向世界成为联合国的非物质文化遗产。在不同的历史阶段，女书文化社区内的成员、团体发挥着各自的作用，承担着不同社会角色和责任。每个群体的角色不是一成不变而，而是随着社会的变迁，不断的变化和重新塑造的。最终形成今天的女书文化社区，而这个社会还在演变当中，这个变化是不会停止的。本研究的目的就是探索该社区内成员对自己社会身份变迁的看法，他们如何看待自己曾经和现在社会角色？如何期待未来的社会角色和女书文化社区的发展？各个群体之间如何形成互动？通过文献阅读、采访、参与式观察对曾经和今天的女书文化社区有一个宏观上的认知，构建和发展"女书文化社区"的概念。在社会身份理论、身份变迁理论的知识框架下，探讨今天女书文化社区不同群体的参与者对自己社会角色和社会互动的感受。从而提出对未来的女书文化社区的期待，以及一些适宜现阶段文化保护和文化开发的模式。

4. Why have I been chosen? 为什么选择我？

You have been chosen because of your long-term experiences on Nüshu cultural activities, Nüshu research, Nüshu cultural governance, or as Nüshu cultural practitioners. Therefore, you can sense a transformation of identity of participants in the Nüshu cultural community and you can share your ideas and feelings on such identity transformation. Your ideas can be the foundation of building a future Nüshu cultural community and improve the development of the Nüshu culture.

您因为您在女书文化活动，女书研究，女书文化治理或女书文化从业者方面的长期经验而被选中。这样您就可以感受到女书文化社区参与者的身份转换，并分享您对这种身份转换的想法和感受。从而支持构建未来女书文化社区的构想。

5. Do I have to take part? 我需要参加吗？

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement on the online consent form. You can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

由您决定是否参加。如果您决定参加，您将能够保留此信息表的副本，并且您应该在同意书上注明您的同意。您仍然可以随时退出。你不必提出一个理由。

6. What will happen to me if I take part? 如果我参加会发生什么？

You will attend an interview which we estimate will take you one hour. You may also wish to agree to a follow-up interview to find out more about your approach.

您将会参加一个持续一小时的采访。如有需要，您可能会被要求参与后续采访，以了解更多关于您的看法。

7. What do I have to do? 我需要做什么？

Please answer the questions in the interview. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating.

你只需要在采访中回答问题。此外没有其他限制。

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part? 参与的可能缺点和风险有哪些？

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life.

预计参与研究不会导致任何不适。潜在的身体和/或心理伤害或窘迫将与任何你的日常生活中的经历相同。

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part? 参与的潜在好处是什么？

Those interviewees participating in the project will be given a gift for appreciate. It is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on Nüshu studies and the protection and development of the Nüshu cultural community. Results will be shared with participants in order to inform their professional work.

参加该项目的受访者将收获一个小礼物作为感谢。希望这项工作能够对女书研究、女书文化社区的保护和发展产生有益的影响。结果将与参与者分享。

10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected? 如果研究研究比预期更早停止，会发生什么？

Should the research stop earlier than planned and you are affected in any way we will tell you and explain why.

如果研究比计划提前停止，并且会给您带来影响，我们会告诉您并解释原因。

11. What if something goes wrong? 如果研究进行的不顺利怎么办？

If you have any complaints about the project in the first instance you can contact any member of the research team. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the University of Leicester to take your complaint further (see below).

如果您首先对项目有任何不满，您可以联系研究小组的任何成员。如果您觉得您的投诉未得到满意处理，您可以联系莱斯特大学进一步采取您的投诉（见下文）。

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? 我参与这个项目会保密吗？

You can choose whether or not to present your own information in any publication or report, such as whether to use your real name, organisation name, whether to provide contact information, and so on. See Consent Form for details. If you want all the information that we collect about you during the course of the research to be kept strictly confidential, then you and your institution will not be identified or be identifiable in any reports or publications. Collected data will be used by the research team. Without your permission, these data will not be shared with other individuals or institutions.

您可以选择是否在任何出版物或报告中出现自己的信息，比如是否使用真实姓名、机构名称、是否提供联系方式等。详情见采访同意书。如果您希望您的个人信息严格保密，这些信息将不会在任何报告或出版物中。收集到的数据将供研究团队使用。未经您的允许，这些数据不会被任何个人或机构获得。

13. Will my interview be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used? 我的采访会被录下来吗？如何使用录制的材料？

Your interview will be recorded by audio/video device. The interview content will be transcribed into textual materials and be analysed. The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

您的采访将通过音频/视频设备录制。面试内容将被转录成文字材料并进行分析。在本研究期间进行的活动的音频和/或视频记录将仅用于分析以及在会议演示和讲座中进行说明。未经您的许可，其他任何人不得再使用或者获得这些原始录音。

14. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives? 你会向我寻求什么类型的信息，为什么收集这些信息与实现研究项目的目标有关？

The interviewer will ask you about your opinions and current practices in relation to being a participant in the Nüshu cultural community. Your views and experience are only what the project is interested in exploring.

采访将问你关于你成为作为女书文化社区参与者的看法和实践。您的观点和经验正是该项目有兴趣探索的内容。

15. What will happen to the results of the research project? 研究项目的结果将会怎样？

Research results will be published as papers. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put you on our circulation list.

研究结果将作为论文出版。如果您希望获得研究结果的任何报告，请告知我们，我们会将研究结果和出版物发送给您。

16. Who is organising and funding the research? 谁在组织和资助本研究？

The project is organised and conducted by Ph. D. student Xihuan Hu from the University of Leicester, UK. The project is supervised by Dr. Yan Ying and Dr. Christian Morgner.

该项目由英国莱斯特大学博士生胡曦幻组织和实施，由应雁博士和 Christian Morgner 博士指导。

17. Who has ethically reviewed the project? 谁对这个项目进行了道德审查？

This project has been ethically approved by the school's ethics review procedure. The University of Leicester's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

该项目得到了学校伦理审查程序的道德批准。莱斯特大学研究伦理委员会负责监督整个大学的伦理审查程序的实施。

18. Contacts for further information 更多信息请联系:

Xihuan Hu. School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University of Leicester, UK. Tel: +4407422934295. Email: xh92@leicester.ac.uk

Supervisors 项目导师:

Dr. Yan Ying, School of Modern Language, University of Leicester, UK. Tel: +44 116 252 5163. Email: yyc12@leicester.ac.uk

Dr. Christian Morgner, School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University of Leicester, UK. Tel: +44 116 252 2440. Email: cm570@leicester.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet. You can keep and copy of the sheet and the signed consent form.

感谢您花时间阅读信息表。您可以保留并复印表格和签署的同意书。

Thank you for taking part in the research.

感谢您参与这项研究。

Date 日期: 2018/5/21

Appendix 3: Outline of Codes

1   Basic Personal Information of Respondent

   1.1   Age
   - Early 30s
   - 30-60
   - Later 60

   1.2   Group of Heritage Identity Background
   - Official Background
   - Folk, Indigenous Background
   - Commercial Background
   - Academic Background

   1.3   (Main) Region of Nüshu Heritage Practices
   - Jiangyong, Hunan
   - Changsha, Hunan
   - Out of Hunan

2   Topics in "Hierarchical Heritage Community"

   2.1   Chuanren (Transmitters)

   2.2   Granting and Updating

   2.3   Influential factors
   - Tizhi
   - Bianzhi
   - Hetonggong
   - Neiding
   - Guanxi

   2.4   Obligations and Duties
   - Activities
   - Voice
   - Implementation (As a Spokesperson)
   - Freedom

   2.5   Marginalisation at the Hierarchical Community
   - Low achievements
     - Income
     - Status
     - Recognition
   - Sense of Exclusion
   - Heritage Identity Crisis
   - Decrease of Willingness of Participation

   2.6   Heritage Identity in Commercial Field
   - Cultural Creative Industry
     - Private Cultural Space
     - ICH Commercialisation

- Influential factors
  - Guanxi (Social Capital)
  - Granting
  - Platforms
- Results
  - Legitimate Practitioners
  - Illegitimate Practitioners (stigmatisation)
  - Self-Empowerment of Symbols

3   Topics in Official/Authoritarian Heritage discourse

3.1   O/AHD Reflected in Authenticity Debates
- Historical Development
  - Inheritance
  - Writing Tools
  - Narratives

3.2   Authenticity Debates Now
- Standardisation
- Official Transmitters
  - Standard and Correct
  - Inconformity
  - Official Support
- Experts
  - ISO
  - Dictionaries and Publications
  - Stigmatisation to Folk Nüshu Experts (Fake Nüshu)
- Folk Nüshu Community
  - Not Standard
  - "Nüshu Mandarin"

3.3   Reasons of Authenticity Debates
- Legitimising Discourse
- Property Rights
- Industry and Commerce Construction
- Local Economy
- Heritage Protection
- Implementation of Authorisation Mechanisms

3.4   Features of O/AHD
- Orthodoxy/Un-orthodoxy
- Monopoly
- Exclusion

3.5   Responses from Folk Society
- Making Heritage Die
- Fossilisation of Spirit
- Making New Order

4 Topics in Folk/Democratic Heritage Discourse

4.1 Media of Nüshu Communication
- Kou Chuan Xin Shou
- Training Class
- Publications
- Heritage Websites
- Museum

4.2 Problems in Traditional Media
- Accessibility
- Interactivity
- Cultural and Political Elitism
- Economic-Oriented

4.3 New Media in Nüshu
- QQ Groups
- WeChat Groups
- WeChat Official Accounts
- Weibo
- Sino Blog

4.4 Influential Factors to WeChat Official Accounts
- Numbers
- Operators
- Vitality and Activity
- User-generated Contents
- Interactions

4.5 Reasons for WeChat Nüshu Media
- For Small Individuals
- Brand Making
- Identity Construction
- Folk Nüshu Transmitters
- Folk Nüshu Discourse

4.6 Features of Folk Nüshu Discourse
- Voting Events
- Democratic
- Gathering
- Demonstrating Self-Evaluation
- Demonstrating Authenticity and Cultural Competency
- Seeking Treatment

4.7 Achievements from Folk Nüshu Discourse
- Inclusion of Participants
- Recognition of Heritage Identity
- Value Distinction between the Official and Folk Communities

4.8 Problems in Folk Nüshu Discourse

- Weak Position
- Lack of Organisation and Mobilisation
- Lack of Funds
- Limited of Social Influence
- Un-authorised Status

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