

# Semi-formal cultural governance and state-sponsored commercialisation in the intangible cultural heritage field: the case of Chongqing, China

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# Semi-formal cultural governance and state-sponsored commercialisation in the intangible cultural heritage field: the case of Chongqing, China

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## ABSTRACT

The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in China is a state-led social movement involving multiple actors, including government bodies, commercial enterprises, inheritors and communities. Most of the established studies have focused on the tensions between the Chinese state and local communities, taking either a top-down or bottom-up approach, based on cases in regions with developed heritage tourism markets. In contrast, this paper examines how the intermediaries between the state and local communities can draw on forces other than the market to safeguard ICH. We offer Yuzhou embroidery, in Ba County, Chongqing, as a case study. Although the state

capacities dedicated to the safeguarding of ICH at the grassroots level are limited, intermediaries can gain access to symbolic resources granted by the state through the accumulation of cultural capital. Thus, they may have more flexibility to cross boundaries, depending on the context, to access state resources from outside the ICH field for its commercialisation. In this semi-formal governance practice, state and cultural actors leverage each other to better safeguard and promote ICH.

## Keywords

intangible cultural heritage, state-sponsored commercialisation, semi-formal cultural governance, boundary crossing

## Introduction

Since the 1970s, the protection of heritage under the impact of globalisation, modernisation and urbanisation has emerged as a crucial priority within the cultural governance agenda for both international organisations and nation-states (Maags 2020; McCandlish and McPherson 2021). China has gradually transformed its prior cultural revolutionary attitude to one that emphasises the value of, and develops policies to actively protect, traditional and folk cultures (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Gao 2013; Ma and Zhu 2014). It is now witnessing a 'heritage craze' (Yan 2018). By 2019, China had the most extensive list of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the world. ICH is today a vital component of

the country's cultural governance system, exerting an influence on society, the economy and even individuals' daily lives (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Kuah and Liu 2016; Maags and Trifu 2019; Oakes 2013; Zhu and Maags 2020). These achievements notwithstanding, questions remain as to how to effectively safeguard, inherit and utilise ICH in order to maintain cultural diversity and guarantee sustainable cultural development in China. Thus, it is essential to examine how to further strengthen China's governance of its ICH.

The governance of ICH in China is a complex process that involves not only the Chinese state actors, such as government agencies at all levels, but also cultural actors,

such as ICH inheritors and communities (Berger and Luckmann 2016). According to the types of actors, prior research on Chinese ICH governance can be classified into two main research streams. The first of these focused on the dominant role of the Chinese state actors in ICH practice by studying the various measures the Chinese government developed to strengthen the protection of ICH, such as the legislative framework, policy implementation and financial support (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Maags and Svensson 2018; Zhu and Maags 2020; Gao 2013; Ma and Zhu 2014; Kuah and Liu 2016). The second stream highlighted the societal dimension by examining the autonomy of cultural actors in ICH practice. These cultural actors include individuals, groups and communities that strive to protect, transmit and even further develop their local culture through strategic actions that dissipate, resist or appropriate the state's power from a bottom-up perspective (Maags and Svensson 2018; Bellocq 2006; Lee 2016; Maags 2018; Varutti 2015; Xia 2020; Yu 2015; Zhang and Wu 2016; Zhu 2015; Wang and Ren 2018; Gao 2006). However, although the state–society dichotomy in the prior literature can help us to understand ICH governance in China, several limitations exist. First, prior studies examined state and cultural actors separately; few studies have examined the complex interactions between them. Prior research views the interaction between state and cultural actors as a zero-sum game, in which 'innocent' cultural actors always struggle against the state's manipulation to defend their treasured culture (Kuutma 2012, 32), which view is inconsistent with the current situation in China. Second, there exist differences in awareness and resources regarding the safeguarding of ICH among officials at different levels, which might lead to 'gaps' in terms of supporting ICH governance effectively in the hierarchical state bureaucracy, requiring collaboration and cooperation with non-state actors such as cultural actors (Su 2020; Maags and Svensson 2018; Fraser 2020). However, little research has investigated how cultural actors act autonomously in response to the limited support offered by the state actors.

To address the abovementioned gaps, this study aims to examine the complex interaction between state and cultural actors in governing ICH in China by drawing on the governmentality approach to examine the relationship between state and self-governance (Foucault 2007). Additionally, we adopt the lens of substantivism, from economic anthropology and sociology, to propose 'state-sponsored commercialisation' as a way to

examine the actions of cultural actors. 'State-sponsored commercialisation' refers to commercial activities that involve multiple stakeholders, but which are mainly supported and facilitated by government entities. This perspective is in line with the current situation of commercialisation of ICH in China and is suitable for exploring the autonomous behaviours of cultural inheritors under the government-led commercialisation environment. A case study in Chongqing Province was conducted using interviews and secondary data. This study offers an in-depth understanding of how state and cultural actors interact and collaborate to safeguard ICH.

## ICH governance and commercialisation

### *ICH governance in China*

Previous research on Chinese ICH governance has two predominant approaches, including top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach attempts to examine the various policies and practices of the Chinese government in protecting ICH and, on this basis, proposes ideas that will improve the state-centric ICH regime. Indeed, after China joined the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2004 the Chinese government promulgated various policies and laws on safeguarding ICH from the top down (Xu et al. 2022; Xu and Tao 2022b). First, it established thousands of official institutions at the national and local levels to protect ICH (Bodolec 2012; Yang 2023). The cadres in these institutions conducted large-scale surveys of ICH resources, thereby establishing a four-level inventory system that includes lists of ICH items and inventories of ICH inheritors. Second, the Chinese government provides financial subsidies (in the form of housing assistance and pensions) to the inheritors (Huang 2013). Third, the Chinese government disseminates ICH through various means based on information and communications technology (ICT) (Xu et al. 2022), the national educational system (Tan 2011) and urban community activities (Li 2023). Finally, the Chinese government encourages and supports ICH projects and their inheritors in practising 'production-based safeguarding', enabling them to thrive in today's modern society by creating products and services for market consumption (Liu and Leng 2016).

Meanwhile, the bottom-up approach maintains a critical stance on the state's top-down 'utilisation' of ICH, advocating for a shift in research focus from the

conservation of heritage to the politics of heritage (Harrison 2012; Smith 2006). Research into the bottom-up approach to the governance of ICH in China typically employs a state–society binary opposition paradigm, highlighting contestations, dissonances and conflicts surrounding heritage-related hegemony and resistance (Waterton and Watson 2013, 550–551). On the one hand, government-led ICH safeguarding has solidified the state’s dominant hegemonic role (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Maags and Svensson 2018; Zhu and Maags 2020; Gao 2013; Ma and Zhu 2014; Kuah and Liu 2016). For instance, the state has excluded the menhu as an ICH inheritance community in folk martial arts due to the negative culture it sees as implicit in the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Zhang 2024). On the other hand, the bottom-up approach highlights the societal dimension by examining the autonomy of cultural actors in ICH practice. As noted above, such cultural actors include individuals, groups or communities that protect, transmit and even further develop their local culture through strategic actions that dissipate, resist or appropriate the state’s power.

Indeed, both approaches enrich our understanding of ICH governance in China. However, there exist several limitations. First, although enacting the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law* in 2011 underscored a national commitment to protecting ICH, the allocated resources, while seemingly extensive, are insufficient for the vast scope of 870,000 heritage resources. This situation raises a critical question: How can inheritors of ICH, especially those who do not receive recognition in the competitive listing system (particularly at the national level), achieve development? Second, prior research views the interaction between state and cultural actors as a zero-sum game in which ‘innocent’ cultural actors always struggle against the state’s manipulation to defend their treasured culture (Kuutma 2012, 32), which, as noted, is inconsistent with the current situation in China. Moreover, power has spontaneously shifted from control and discipline to driving social subjects to regulate or self-govern, according to Foucault (2007). This has raised a question: Beyond the model of state hegemonic domination and community strategic resistance, what other characteristics can determine China’s governance of ICH?

To answer the question, this paper utilises the governmentality approach to examine how the state and society intersect in protecting heritage, and what effects

this interaction produces. The governmentality approach suggests that, historically, the state can no longer govern simply by controlling or disciplining; rather, its power lies in administering and fostering autonomous subjects (Hindess 2001; Rose and Miller 2010). The relationship between the state and society is not merely one of hegemony and resistance. Therefore, moving beyond the state–society dichotomy, the governmentality approach reframes heritage not as a process driven solely from one direction – either top-down or bottom-up. Thus, this study deems the governmentality approach as an appropriate one for examining interactions between state and cultural actors in governing ICH in China.

### ***Market-driven and state-sponsored commercialisation of ICH***

Market-driven commercialisation has emerged as a key strategy for advancing China’s cultural system reforms. In this environment, state-led safeguarding of ICH has increasingly merged with marketisation efforts (Su 2020; Wang 2023). There are two primary ways the state influences ICH marketisation: it can grant cultural practitioners the prestigious title of ‘ICH’ and ‘ICH inheritors’, which can then be leveraged for branding and marketing (Demgenski 2020; Maags 2018; Pang and Sun 2020). The state can also provide free or low-rent spaces at tourism venues such as museums and tourist attractions, which enables inheritors to access the tourism market and boost their economic returns (Maags 2021; Zhang 2020).

Although the line between safeguarding and marketisation of ICH is increasingly blurred in practice, the debate over the impact of state-led marketisation on ICH remains significant in academia. Some scholars emphasise that marketisation distorts ‘culture’ – for instance, by making folklore performative and staged – leading to the loss of ICH’s traditional and natural meaning (Yan 2021). In addition, a primary concern is that state-led ICH consumption and display practices with political and economic interests have led to the marginalisation of communities and individuals as bearers of ICH (You 2020; Zhang 2020). Nevertheless, other scholars argue for a more nuanced consideration of state-led ICH marketisation. They suggest that while marketisation can exacerbate social inequities, it also offers these inheritors avenues to enhance their social status and increase their economic returns (Demgenski and Maags 2021; Zhu and Maags 2020).

It is obvious that the state-led ICH marketisation has both positive and negative implications. The critical issue, therefore, is not simply to differentiate these impacts but to delve into the mechanisms and consequences of how ICH is marketised (Maags 2021). The existing research in this regard focuses on tourism-related aspects, but the fact is that many ICH sites are not equipped to handle tourism business. In China, the majority of ICH elements are located in areas at the county level and even below. Although local governments want to promote ICH-related tourism, very few places – with the exception of cities like Nanjing, Lijiang and Wenchuan – have succeeded (Zhang 2014; Zhu and Maags 2020). Most lesser-known regions do not have the conditions and opportunities to promote tourism successfully. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how, in regions with little or no tourism infrastructure, ICH is safeguarded under the state-led safeguarding model.

We adopt the lens of substantivism from economic anthropology and sociology to address the above issues. According to the substantivist approach, ‘commerce’ is viewed as an exchange activity aimed at fulfilling human needs or sustaining livelihoods and not necessarily driven by profit motives (Polanyi 2001, 6). In contrast, the ‘market’ is defined as a competitive arena where numerous homogeneous, anonymous individuals engage in transactions at negotiated exchange rates, or ‘prices’ (Aspers 2011). The market mechanism that occupies the mainstream of modern society is not the initial model of commerce in human history (Braudel 1992); what has long been the main method of commercial exchange for humans is methods other than the market, such as reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi 2001, 64–66). In other words, the market is merely one form of exchange within commerce. Today, the term ‘market’ is synonymous with commerce in mainstream society because a key characteristic of modern society is the dominance of the price-making market system as the primary method of exchange. Modern society is even called a ‘market society’, underscoring market logic’s dominance (Cangiani 2011). This is true even for China post-1978 (Nee 1996). However, as noted by some theorists, modern society is differentiated into multiple spheres (Luhmann 1982). Therefore, although market logic (centred on profit maximisation through competition and price mechanisms) occupies a dominant position in modern market societies, it does not mean there are no other non-market means of commercial exchange, even if they are influenced by

market logic.

Through the lens of substantivism, we define ‘commercialisation’ as the ongoing process of meeting human needs and sustaining livelihoods through various forms of exchange. Consequently, we propose an alternative to market-driven commercialisation: state-sponsored commercialisation. Unlike marketisation, where transactions between anonymous, homogeneous actors are driven by price competition and a simple profit motive (buy low, sell high), state-sponsored commercialisation occurs through social interactions among diverse, identified actors under state guidance. In this model, the action logic is varied and not primarily profit-focused. Although state-sponsored commercialisation and marketisation are often intertwined in practice, there is no clear boundary in ICH safeguarding. We propose that the conceptions here are mainly a distinction at the analytical level to help us further carefully examine the diversity and complexity of state-led ICH safeguarding practices.

## Research settings and method

### *Research settings*

Yuzhou embroidery, originating from Ba County in the northeast of Chongqing, exemplifies cross-stitch, an ancient form of embroidery that is recognised globally. Despite its somewhat rudimentary appearance compared to the detailed realism of random-stitch embroidery, cross-stitch has gained widespread acceptance in Ba County due to the relatively short time required to complete the embroidery. This study has selected Yuzhou embroidery as a case study for several compelling reasons.

First, in terms of its geographical context, Ba County has a predominantly agricultural economy and lacks a robust foundation for tourism development. This poses significant challenges for the market-driven commercialisation of ICH. As a representative form of ICH in Ba County, Yuzhou embroidery provides a critical perspective for exploring the interactions between ICH governance and state-sponsored commercialisation within economically underdeveloped regions. Second, the cultural evolution of Yuzhou embroidery from a local craft to a national-level ICH represents China’s structured four-level ICH safeguarding system (national, provincial, city and county). Analysing the trajectory of Yuzhou

embroidery offers valuable insights into how county-level ICH can be effectively safeguarded and cultivated through concerted efforts among diverse cultural actors. Third, the role of the cultural inheritor Zhao (interviewee K), the primary inheritor of Yuzhou embroidery, stands out among China's ICH inheritors. Zhao merges her cultural interest in Yuzhou embroidery with entrepreneurial vigour, having established the Yuzhou Embroidery Company. This dual capacity enables her both to make significant contributions to embroidery worker training and to promote the cultural significance of Yuzhou embroidery. Critically, Zhao serves as a cultural intermediary, facilitating connections between the state and the ICH practitioners and playing an active role in promoting and safeguarding Yuzhou embroidery amid limited national support.

### **Research method**

This study's empirical data, which included government official documents and interviews, was collected qualitatively from April to July 2020. Specifically, local official documents and archives were collected with the help of local officers. This secondary data can help us to understand the government's strategies and actions regarding ICH governance at different levels, while interviews can offer the individual experiences and opinions of various actors involved in ICH governance. Regarding interviews, although the pandemic was ongoing during that time, it was well under control in China, particularly in the rural areas of Chongqing. People were only required to wear masks while interacting with others; thus, 23 face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with ICH inheritors, community residents and local government officials through a snowball sample (see Appendix). There are two types of interview questions, depending on the type of interviewee. For state actors such as government officials, the questions sought basic information (e.g. age, gender and personal position), work organisation and organisational structure, workflow and tasks regarding ICH governance, and personal experience and understanding related to ICH inheritors, ICH industry development, and existing problems, opportunities and challenges. For cultural actors such as inheritors, questions sought basic information (e.g. age and gender), personal experience related to ICH (e.g. journey and story about being recommended as inheritors), career plan regarding ICH, personal understanding related to ICH governance, ICH industry development, and existing problems, opportunities and challenges, as well as the role of the state/government. To ensure the confidentiality

of this study, all personal information that could be disclosed was anonymised.

### **Within the ICH field: state capacity and its limits**

Prior literature suggests that the state's capacity lies in the following dimensions: administrative, financial-resource/financial-extractive, relational, legal, coercive, and territorial control (Cingolani 2018; Wang and Hu 1993). In the field of ICH, legal, financial-resource and administrative capacities should be considered, since ICH typically does not involve relational, coercive or territorial control. Specifically, in the ICH field, the 'ability' of the state actor is mainly reflected in the fact that it can establish a national system of ICH safeguarding through a legislative framework and develop Chinese ICH projects for cultural governance. Simultaneously, the state actor has an 'inability', in that it has limited ability to achieve the goals of effective cultural governance due to its limited financial-resource and administrative capacities. Thus, legal capacity, financial resource capacity and administrative capacity were employed as three main dimensions for examining the state's capacity in ICH in this study.

#### ***'Extremely powerful': the legal capacity of the state actor***

Legal capacity is an important state capacity for the ICH governance practice in China. The *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China* (ICHLPRC) came into force in June 2011. It consists of six chapters in total, with chapters 1–4 forming the core of the text. The law summarises previous experience of safeguarding ICH in China and establishes a framework for the various actors in the field.

Chapter 1 of the ICHLPRC defines the objectives of the ICH governance as 'promoting the outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation', 'strengthening the cultural identity of the Chinese nation', 'safeguarding national unity and national solidarity' and 'facilitating social harmony and sustainable development'. In other words, ICH's cultural governance goals highlight political and ideological functions (Zhu and Maags 2020; Zhang and Lin 2017). In practice, these state goals often translate into evaluating the effectiveness of ICH safeguarding. According to the general understanding of the cultural administration and cultural officials such as Wang (2013, 287–289),<sup>1</sup> the effectiveness of ICH safeguarding can be evaluated from

two aspects: the effectiveness of ICH safeguarding itself, and the ICH's effect on the public's awareness. The former refers to the number and scope of folk culture resources covered by ICH safeguarding, while the latter refers to the public's knowledge and understanding of ICH. This assessment was also reflected in the view of several grassroots cultural cadres who treated their work as the investigation and dissemination of ICH. Interviewee A:

The significance of our ICH work is inheritance and safeguarding. Firstly, we want more people to know and accept ICH. Secondly, we want to provide opportunities and space for more ICH through national financial support; thus, they can be better protected.

According to chapter 2, the most basic level of the ICH survey is organised by county-level governments and implemented by county-level cultural sectors. The ICH survey in Ba County, promoted by the County Bureau of Culture, was conducted twice, in 2007 and 2009, resulting in 61 county-level ICH items.

The ICH lists and inheritor lists are the core of chapter 3 and of the ICH governance practice in China. These lists involve national, provincial, municipal and county-level systems, and items and persons entering the two programmes can access symbolic and material resources provided by the state. These four-level lists constitute a hierarchy; the higher the level, the more resources are available. Various actors in the ICH field must participate in this competitive game and abide by its rules if they want to obtain more resources (Maags 2018). The county-level ICH lists are the lowest level and the basis of the vast system. The Ba County government has published three county-level ICH lists (in 2008, October 2010 and December 2010) comprising 61 ICH items. Yuzhou embroidery is from the third batch of county-level ICH lists. In addition, chapter 3 stipulates three rules for identifying representative ICH inheritors: they should be 'a master of the ICH', be a 'representative in a specific field and of great influence in a certain region', and 'actively carry out inherited activities'. These rules are implemented even at the lowest level of the system. Interviewee A, director of the ICH Office of the Ba County Cultural Center, said that they have three main criteria for recommending ICH inheritors to the Chongqing Municipal Commission of Culture and Tourism (CMCCT):

First, we check whether the person's skills have any

local influence or not [...]. Second, we check whether the person is enthusiastic about participating in the activities we hold or not [...]. Third, we check whether the person has a master. If the person meets all these three criteria, then we will recommend him/her as an ICH inheritor.

Finally, chapter 4 stipulates that the government should promote and display ICH. Indeed, the ICH display is an important indicator to assess the work of ICH safeguarding at the county level, and has become the core tasks of the ICH Office of Ba County. Interviewee A:

The CMCCT not only requires us to participate in every exhibition activity related to ICH that it organises, but also instructs us to conduct activities related to ICH on Cultural and Natural Heritage Day [the second Saturday of June each year]. However, it does not stipulate any specific content.

The state actor has the legal capacity to establish the ICH regime, which includes a survey system, a four-level ICH lists system, a four-level representative ICH inheritor lists system and a system for disseminating ICH. Moreover, with its solid legal capacity, the state can also conduct ICH governance; since 2004, China has included 101,625 ICH items into the ICH lists and 89,744 ICH inheritors into the ICH inheritor lists (Song 2020, 14). Provinces, prefectures and counties nationwide actively conduct thousands of publicity, exhibition and dissemination activities for ICH each year, and 72 local regulations have been enacted to safeguard ICH (CCICHS 2017).

### ***'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak': the financial resource capacity of the state actor***

If people only consider the strong legal capacity of the state, they may view China as an 'extremely powerful' government in the ICH field (Wang and Hu 1993). However, this is not the case when analysing the state's financial resources and administrative capacities. Empirical data from Ba County shows that although the Chinese state appears to have invested significant money in ICH governance and has established formal bureaucratic organisations that have extended to the county level, the financial and human resources available to the state at the grassroots level are scarce.

In 2006, the central government established a special fund for national ICH safeguarding. By 2019, the state had

**Table 1**

Cumulative financial investment in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in China, 2011–2015 (million yuan)

Administrative levels	Provincial finance	Prefectural finance	County-level finance
Nationwide	1637.31	1019.09	1236.56

Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China website.

invested more than 7 billion yuan in the fund. Moreover, the provincial, municipal and county levels have all invested considerable financial resources in ICH work. Considering the national data from 2011–2015, the money invested in ICH at these levels is shown in [Table 1](#) (CCICHS 2017).

As the Chinese official report stated, '[Although] the financial support for ICH has been increasing year after year, it is still not sufficient to meet the actual needs of the work, and there is a general problem of inadequate funding for safeguarding in all provinces' (CCICHS 2017); and '[T]he financial support of districts and counties for traditional folk culture safeguarding is seriously limited' (CMCCT 2018). Interviewees agreed. Interviewee A:

The apparent massive investment of financial resources for full coverage masks the fact that the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Interviewee B, who is in charge of industry and economy at the Ba County Commission of Culture and Tourism (BCCCT), also stated:

Ba County is far less wealthy than the cities in the developed eastern region, and we almost can't get any money from the county government.

Even though the Chongqing Municipal Finance Bureau invested 31.23 million yuan in ICH safeguarding between 2011 and 2015, funding for ICH work at the county level has been in short supply. [Table 2](#) depicts the annual culture, sports and media expenditure in Ba County from 2007 to 2015. Cultural expenditure is almost always less than 1% of local financial expenditure (except in 2014). Interviewee A:

We only have a very small portion of the project funding allocated by CMCCT, and the county government did not even give us a penny.

The state's limited financial resources at the grassroots level have had at least two consequences: first, both CMCCT and BCCCT have paid more attention to the economic dimension of ICH in practice. Interviewee A:

**Table 2**

Culture expenditure as a percentage of total local expenditure, Ba County, 2007–2015

Year	Total local finance expenditure (million yuan)	Culture, sports and media expenditure (million yuan)	Culture expenditure as a percentage of total local expenditure (%)
2007	722.37	2.47	0.34
2008	962.61	5.50	0.57
2009	1443.24	4.03	0.28
2010	1890.24	unknown	unknown
2011	2501.66	18.81	0.75
2012	3025.88	14.46	0.48
2013	3135.63	14.48	0.46
2014	3404.88	36.05	1.06
2015	4032.82	38.37	0.95

Source: Ba County Finance Bureau document.

If one ICH item already has an inheritor, CMCCT is reluctant to add more people, because each additional inheritor means paying an additional 6,000 yuan per year.

... [T]he best way for the government to safeguard ICH is to turn ICH into a cultural industry, thus attracting more people to work on it.

Second, if an ICH is not listed on the provincial lists, it receives almost no external resources. For instance, Interviewee D, the former director of the Ba County Cultural Centre, said:

[A]lthough there are 61 county-level ICH items in Ba County, the cultural department does not have the energy or funding to safeguard them. Only when their inheritors are listed on the provincial ICH inheritor lists, those persons get a monthly grant of 500 yuan from the provincial government. In addition, the county government will not give money, the cultural department has no money for inheritors, and there is only a little money for implementing projects.

***‘A thousand threads above and one needle below’: administrative capacity of the state actor***

There is a severe lack of administrative capacity for the state actor, as the bureaucratic organisation in the state does not have sufficient human resources to carry out its work on ICH.

In 2006 and 2009, the state established the China Centre for ICH Safeguarding and the ICH Department of the Ministry of Culture, respectively. It laid down a bureaucratic organisation for the work of the Chinese ICH, with the ICH Department (divisions and sections) of cultural sectors as the leading organisation, and the ICH Centre as the working body (Bodolec 2012). This

bureaucratic organisation has been extended to the 31 provinces. The 2016 data reveals that there are 281 ICH divisions (sections) and 376 ICH centres at the prefectural level and 616 ICH divisions (sections) and 1749 ICH centres at the county level nationwide (Table 3) (CCICHS 2017). In fact, although the ICH work organisations in Ba County are only subsidiary units, they have completely transplanted this set of bureaucratic organisations. The leading organisational body for ICH work in Ba County is the Public Service Section of BCCCT, while the actual working body is the ICH Office of the County Cultural Centre, which, as one of the most basic units, constitutes a complete, huge administrative system for national ICH safeguarding.

Previous studies have argued that in both Western states and modern China, the increasingly sophisticated cultural governance bureaucratic hierarchy of the state means that the state actor is not only consciously intervening in the shaping and management of culture, but also increasingly capable of penetrating culture and society (Thomas and Meyer 1984; Xiao 2016). The well-developed cultural governance bureaucratic organisation from the central to the county level in China also foreshadows a state actor with strong state capacity in the ICH field. However, our empirical data suggests that this argument does not correspond to the actual situation. The ICH Office of Ba County, as the end of the vast and complete national cultural administrative hierarchy, is extremely understaffed. A Ba County cultural sector cadre uses a metaphor to describe this situation: ‘A thousand threads at the top, a needle at the bottom’,<sup>2</sup> implying the difficulty and challenges of resolving practical issues when human resources are limited.

Interviewee A:

Although BCCCT announced that I am dedicated to ICH work, I actually have no qualifications in folklore

**Table 3**  
ICH work organisations in China, 2016

Administrative levels	Independent ICH divisions (sections)	Subsidiary ICH divisions (sections)	Independent ICH centres	Subsidiary ICH centres
Provincial level	22	9	14	17
Prefectural level	97	184	65	311
County level	84	532	208	1541

Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China website.

or ICH. Moreover, I only have less than a third of my working time and energy to do this job, because I am also responsible for the cultural center, museum, relics management center, cultural activities, and so on. So, I have to take a perfunctory attitude towards the ICH work most of the time.

The shortage of actual staff at the grassroots level leads to the phenomenon of working perfunctorily, and to the ineffectiveness of ICH safeguarding, as many worthy folk cultures and inheritors cannot be included in the list by the ICH survey in time.

Despite the limitations of financial resources and administrative capacities, the state has developed a way of leveraging the limited capacity by asking for help from other forces. There are two ways of leveraging the actual work of the Ba County ICH Office: internal and external. Internal leveraging targets the social networks of cultural cadres. This approach is limited in its effectiveness in achieving cultural governance goals, as it is usually employed to fulfil the tasks and assessments of higher cultural sectors. For instance, BCCCT is required to provide ten seven-minute films when applying for the provincial ICH. It would cost about 150,000 yuan to complete all films. However, BCCCT provided only 30,000 yuan to the ICH Office to shoot and edit all the films. The cadres of the ICH Office had to ask their personal friends to donate money to complete the work. External leveraging comes from cultural actors in an advantageous position in the ICH field. External leveraging by the Ba County ICH Office is an unintended consequence. The following section further explains how cultural actors in the ICH field have sought resources from other fields.

### **Boundary crossing: the interaction between cultural actors and the state**

In the Chinese ICH field, despite the state's domination of symbolic and material resources (Maags 2020), cultural actors can still access socio-cultural capital (Kuah and Liu 2016; Oakes 2013). As discussed above, the state financial resources and administrative capacities in the Ba County ICH field are insufficient; therefore, cultural actors (e.g. embroidery inheritors) must seek resources from outside the ICH field when resources are limited. For instance, Zhao, as an embroidery inheritor, used her own cultural capital and constructed the image of the 'crazy embroiderer'

to cross the boundary of the ICH field and participate in the cultural elite group at Ba County which does not belong to the ICH field; by doing so, Zhao finally gained state recognition and was recommended as an ICH inheritor. 'Boundaries' refers to conceptual distinctions made by actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space (Lamont and Molnár 2002), such as the limits set up to distinguish ICH from other fields. 'Boundary crossing' means the act of traversing, violating or moving beyond a defined boundary. In this case, Zhao blurred the boundary of ICH, such as acting as an ICH inheritor, but moved beyond ICH to be a 'culturist' and even a 'businesswoman'. Therefore, she can obtain external resources from outside of the ICH field in Ba County, ultimately promoting the commercialisation and mass dissemination of Yuzhou embroidery.

#### ***'Crazy embroiderer': integrating into the cultural elite group and promoting heritagisation***

People are legitimised to enter the field by their possession of some form of specific capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 107–108), while the state overwhelmingly determines the rules, formation, stability and transformation of the field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 81). In Ba County, those who want to enter the ICH field must possess the relevant cultural capital and be accepted and formally recognised by the state and its agents. In the case of Zhao, her strategy was to accumulate objectified cultural capital by collecting a large amount of traditional embroidery, create the image of the 'crazy embroiderer', be recognised as such by a broader and wider community such as the cultural elite group in Ba County and, finally, to obtain from the group outside of the ICH field the resources and support needed to promote the heritagisation of Yuzhou embroidery.

The initial process of heritagisation of Yuzhou embroidery was concentrated during the period from 2005 to 2011 and included two main stages.<sup>3</sup> In the first stage, Zhao collected traditional embroidery and hired local people to make embroidery works based on masterpieces of Chinese art, with the specific aim of accumulating objectified cultural capital for herself. She had learned embroidery from her mother, a seamstress. (The traditional Yuzhou embroidery skills in Ba County were far less complicated than those of other embroideries, such as Su embroidery.) Since 2005, she has taught local women how to make embroidery and offered them high prices to replicate traditional embroidery. She believed

her approach was very far-sighted:

At that time, I thought that if the traditional embroidery skills were not passed down, they might be lost in a few years; so, I decided to teach these left-behind women how to embroider free. Moreover, I provided them not only with free sewing materials, but also salaries so that they could go home and embroider [...] I spent an average of 3,000 yuan to buy a piece from them. I remember the most expensive embroidery I ever bought cost me 68,000 yuan, which could afford a 120 square meter apartment in our county at that time. Now I have not owned an apartment in the county seat yet. Do you think I am stupid? [...] I felt this would be a hit and popular when I conducted it; no one else could come and share the profits because I had already paid for these things before, and they belonged to me. That is why I was paying them well.

However, as researchers pointed out, 'a capital does not exist and function except to a field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101). Zhao understood that even though she had collected many traditional embroideries, it was difficult for her to 'make a splash' without obtaining attention and support from the government. Therefore, in the second stage, she actively created an image of herself as a 'crazy embroiderer' addicted to and skilled in embroidery (culture). Instead of confining herself to the ICH field, she crossed the boundary of ICH and participated in the cultural elite group to publicise her story. Interviewee C, a cultural cadre in Zhao's hometown, highlighted the impression that Zhao made:

We were only paid a few hundred yuan a month for an inheritor in the early 2000s, but she was in debt tens of thousands of yuan for hiring people to embroider for her [...] In 2006, I was working with the chairman of the County Federation of Literary and Art Circles on the ICH survey, and I told him there was such a crazy person who engaged in culture. Then the literati in the county slowly started to bring Zhao along to the cultural circles.

Zhao also told the story of her engagement with the cultural elite group:

That thing [embroidery] was constantly on my mind at the time, so I always subconsciously mentioned it

when I was talking with others. The people around me thought I was crazy [...] I liked to hang out with the literati. There was a cadre in the County Propaganda Department when I was out with the literati at the time [2008]. After I told him about my embroidery, he thought the County Bureau of Culture should support me. At that time, neither he nor I knew about the ICH safeguarding. But he was close to the director of the County Bureau of Culture. After the director learned that I was obsessed with embroidery and that I had collected hundreds of pieces of embroidery by myself, the County Bureau of Culture started telling me how to apply for ICH.

Through the joint efforts of Zhao and the cultural elite group, the local government noticed the embroidery and finally included it on county-level ICH lists (2010) and provincial ICH lists (2011). In addition, Zhao became a county-level ICH inheritor (2012) and a provincial ICH inheritor (2013). Her strategy of accumulating objectified cultural capital and seeking external support by crossing the boundary of the ICH field eventually led to state recognition of both Yuzhou embroidery and herself, building the base for her to acquire resources from both inside and outside the ICH field.

### ***'Culturist' and 'businesswoman': commercialisation in the context of limited state capacity***

Initially, Zhao aspired to become a well-known folk artist by winning competitions with these large cross-stitch embroideries, selling them, and organising solo exhibitions of her Yuzhou embroidery collections. However, achieving the status of a provincial-level inheritor did not realise her aspirations. Although some official cultural institutions purchased and collected several of Zhao's large cross-stitch embroideries, providing her with an income of over 100,000 yuan, she did not gain instant fame. In addition, considering that these sold pieces took years to complete, they all cost more than 100,000 yuan in labour, so this approach is not sustainable. Moreover, our previous analysis indicated that national resources dedicated to safeguarding ICH are very limited in Ba County. Local cultural cadres also noted that the development of the embroidery industry in Yuzhou relies heavily on Zhao's efforts to seek multiple resources outside the cultural field. This means that we need to focus beyond that field.

Next, drawing upon Zhao's experiences, we will analyse the state-sponsored commercialisation of Yuzhou embroidery through three distinct phases.

### **1. The initial stage**

With limited assistance from the cultural department for Yuzhou embroidery, Zhao took action on three fronts. First, she utilised her role as a provincial inheritor of ICH to participate extensively in provincial and national expositions focused on intangible cultural heritage, cultural industries, and arts and crafts. Her Yuzhou embroidery (cross-stitch) work *Premier Wen in Wenchuan* won the gold medal at the National Arts and Crafts Expo. Second, despite the honours, Zhao did not gain recognition from the market, and she quit her stable job to study random-stitch embroidery. This shift marked a significant career change and increased the financial pressures she faced. Third, Zhao became familiar with an official of the Chongqing Municipal Economic and Information Technology Commission because of the Yuzhou Embroidery Gold Award work *Premier Wen in Wenchuan*. This relationship resulted in governmental acknowledgement and guidance, culminating in the establishing of the Yuzhou Embroidery Company and a significant subsidy of 200,000 yuan from the Ba County Economic and Information Technology Commission.

At this stage, Zhao's focus is to display Yuzhou embroidery through exposition platforms at all levels, and its core image is the inheritor of ICH – that is, a 'culturalist'. Through interaction with the Chongqing Municipal Economic and Information Technology Commission, Zhao established a related ICH company and received subsidies from the Ba County Economic and Information Technology Commission. From this point forward, Zhao gradually transformed from a 'culturalist' to a 'businesswoman'.

### **2. Transformation stage**

During the development of Yuzhou embroidery, Zhao gradually realised that Ba County's national capabilities dedicated to protecting ICH are extremely limited. However, the allocation of national capabilities may be uneven, which means that national capabilities in other fields, such as poverty alleviation, may be stronger (He 2016). Therefore, Zhao began to transform and integrate into the national 'targeted poverty alleviation' strategy. In China, 'targeted poverty alleviation' is a major political task nationally, and the Poverty Alleviation Office serves as a 'platform' that arranges the deployment of financial

resources and fosters collaborative efforts across administrative boundaries (Wang and Su 2020). As Interviewee I said:

In 2015, Ba County received 30 million yuan for targeted assistance, which could be used for various purposes, including subsidies and the planning of industrial parks. After deciding to build an e-commerce industrial park, we held an E-commerce Entrepreneurship Forum. When other entrepreneurs talked about agriculture and industry, only Zhao talked about developing culture, which everyone found novel. After the meeting, our leaders invited her to settle in the e-commerce industrial park for free. At the end of the year, city leaders came to inspect the e-commerce industrial park and spoke highly of their company's development.

The integration of Yuzhou embroidery and Ba County's targeted poverty alleviation strategy unfolds in two main ways. On the one hand, Yuzhou Embroidery Company, recognised as a local ICH enterprise, was granted free entry into the Ba County E-commerce Industrial Park and received financial support through government orders for embroidered gifts. This development was facilitated mainly by Zhao's effective engagement with the Ba County Commerce Commission and key leaders from Chongqing Municipality. As a 'culturalist', Zhao proposed the development of traditional cultural industries in Ba County, a traditional agricultural county, at the Ba County Rural E-commerce Entrepreneurship Forum, which the Ba County Commerce Committee leaders affirmed. As a 'businesswoman', Zhao has received many visits from Chongqing's main leaders in Ba County's e-commerce industrial park and gained recognition from them. These interactions boosted her company's visibility and secured significant preferential policies and economic incentives, such as free admission to the e-commerce park and substantial orders for her embroidery products.

On the other hand, Yuzhou Embroidery Company was chosen to implement several government-funded poverty alleviation projects. The Ba County Women's Federation provided Zhao with funds to promote the employment of rural women, recognising her influence as a local female entrepreneur and her capacity to drive socio-economic enhancement for rural women through cultural industries. This collaboration was viewed as an excellent opportunity to advance the Women's Federation's poverty alleviation

efforts. As Interviewee J said:

We have a poverty alleviation fund allocated by the Poverty Alleviation Office to the Women's Federation. Zhao is a female entrepreneur and is well-known in the local cultural field. We invited her to conduct training projects for rural women to promote employment and income growth for these rural women.

Furthermore, the Ba County Human Resources and Social Security Bureau engaged Zhao's company to host poverty alleviation workshops and skills training projects. As Interviewee F stated:

First, Yuzhou embroidery is a provincial-level ICH and has a certain influence and popularity. Second, it has local characteristics, and many women have embroidery backgrounds. Meanwhile, it is a skill that can help local people train and master a skill, and provide them with employment opportunities nearby. Thus, we are glad to give this project to Zhao.

Within these interactions, Zhao crosses the boundary of 'culturalist' and 'businesswoman', engaging with different government departments and leaders, promoting the safeguarding and development of Yuzhou embroidery.

### **3. Expansion stage**

Zhao fully embraced her role as a cultural entrepreneur, gaining national recognition for her contributions to both the cultural and economic sectors. Her active participation in high-level exhibitions and substantial media coverage significantly raised her profile, establishing her as a prominent figure in cultural entrepreneurship. This phase marks her successful business transition, where she effectively utilised state-funded platforms to broaden her business scope and increase her influence across the country. Her work received commendations from various ministries, and she obtained numerous contracts from government and private sectors, showcasing her endeavours' economic and social impacts. This success illustrates the successful integration of cultural protection within a broader economic context. It is important to acknowledge that the government's primary focus was on alleviating poverty related to ICH, with secondary attention to supporting Zhao and her Yuzhou embroidery initiative specifically. After this round of targeted poverty

alleviation, Zhao has turned her focus to the new national strategy of 'rural revitalisation'. By aligning Yuzhou embroidery with this new initiative, she aims to gain further support from various governmental levels, enhancing the sustainability and ongoing development of Yuzhou embroidery. With this expanded interaction, Zhao is enabled to leverage additional resources and support, potentially enhancing the scope and impact of her business endeavours. The more access Zhao gains to larger platforms and the more she engages with additional government departments, the more likely she is to encounter increased opportunities through the state-sponsored commercialisation of Yuzhou embroidery.

### **Between state and cultural actors: semi-formal cultural governance and state-sponsored commercialisation within the ICH field**

The mutually complementary relationship between state and cultural actors has helped, to some extent, to achieve the goals of cultural governance. Despite the limited state capacity for ICH safeguarding, Zhao was given an official title, which she used to obtain resources from various state policies besides ICH to promote the commercialisation of Yuzhou embroidery, allowing embroidery to continue as an ICH in modern daily life. More community residents in the embroidery-producing workshop neighbourhood are becoming aware of the ICH that is defined and supported by the state. When we asked them how they heard about ICH, almost all of them claimed they learned about it through Zhao and her company's publicity.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as Zhao continues to promote Yuzhou embroidery, an increasing number of grassroots people are becoming aware of and understanding ICH. For instance, more than 300 local people in Ba County received embroidery training from Zhao's company in 2018 and 2019. As Interviewee A said:

The general public rarely understood the traditional skills, patterns, and meanings of embroidery, while if people engage in Yuzhou embroidery, they will gradually understand and become familiar with it, and eventually, their cultural confidence can be enhanced.

As a result, while semi-formal cultural actors such as Zhao leverage resources outside the ICH field to promote themselves, the outcome is consistent with the state's ICH governance objectives. What emerges between state and

cultural actors is semi-formal governance within the ICH field.

Semi-formal cultural governance embodies the 'arts of government' in the contemporary Chinese ICH field, where state-sponsored ICH commercialisation is dependent on the emergence of cultural subjectivity. According to Maags (2018), cultural practitioners commonly employ personal social connections to win inscription on the ICH items and inheritor lists. However, the state's limited financial and human resources for safeguarding ICH are usually directed to regions with developed ICH-related tourism, leaving cultural practitioners elsewhere with only the symbolic resources of an official title. Therefore, cultural actors in areas where tourism is neither renowned nor developed must meet the state's need for culture if they want to stand out and profit from ICH – that is, to become autonomous subjects capable of transmitting and promoting culture. Cultural actors such as Zhao understand how to use boundary work to establish a 'culturalist' image promoted and valued by state actors at different levels, and how to flexibly employ this image to capture decision-makers' attention to profit from various state-sponsored programmes. Interviewee B, who helped Zhao with many embroidery skills-training projects, mentioned:

We picked Yuzhou embroidery as a skills training project because Zhao is an ICH inheritor with a certain level of popularity. Embroidery may assist local people in acquiring a skill and satisfy the state's demand for targeted poverty reduction.

Unlike some Chinese governmentality studies (e.g. Bray and Jeffreys 2016) that emphasise the critical roles played by urban planners, hospital managers, public health agencies and other experts in transforming diverse fields of government in present-day China, the cultural subjects of the ICH field typically come from and operate at the grassroots level. However, they are also likely to interact with various other fields beyond that field.

Furthermore, semi-formal cultural governance requires operating in a specific social context. It is important to note that, on the one hand, this non-institutionalised governance requires that ICH be integrated into modern everyday life (whether as a way of life or as a cultural resource to be commodified). This means having audience groups for the ICH; for instance, Zhao profited in the market

because of the boundary crossing and because consumers were willing to pay for cultural consumption (Fang 2018). On the other hand, semi-formal cultural governance also requires the support of several cultural practitioners, such as inheritors and producers, to function. For instance, the producers of Yuzhou embroidery are all landowning peasants. They can engage in farming while earning cash income through temporary jobs. This livelihood model is prevalent in contemporary rural China (Huang 2006a, 2006b; Xia and He 2017). The informal employment allows the Yuzhou Embroidery Company to compete in the market at a lower cost of production, as producers who have land as a welfare guarantee are willing to accept a lower income. In addition, this social context allows the company to obtain certain subsidies from the government (indirect subsidies from government skills training projects for the rural underemployed and direct subsidies from government incentives for the company to hire these people). In short, the specific social context in China (i.e. the growing middle-class audiences and prevailing informal employment) set the basis for autonomous semi-formal cultural actors such as Zhao to promote state-sponsored ICH commercialisation and contribute to the achievement of the goals of ICH governance.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study initially examines the interaction of both state and cultural actors in governing ICH in China via a case study in Chongqing. The findings reveal that state and cultural actors in the Chinese ICH field are not in a conflictual relationship, as previous studies suggest, but in a semi-formal cooperative interaction. Specifically, first, our findings suggest that the financial and administrative capacity of state actors in safeguarding ICH are limited and insufficient at the grassroots level. Table 1 shows that substantial investments were made in safeguarding ICH, with provincial, municipal and county levels contributing 1637.31, 1019.09 and 1236.56 million yuan, respectively, over four years. However, a closer examination of Ba County reveals a stark contrast; between 2007 and 2015, cultural spending in Ba County did not exceed 1% of its total local expenditure (Table 2), indicating a significant discrepancy in the effectiveness of these investments at the grassroots level. In addition, our interviews also revealed that although Ba County has established an organisation dedicated to safeguarding ICH, this organisation is minimally staffed with only one part-time member. Therefore, the time and resources available to safeguard ICH in Ba County are


significantly limited. This discrepancy underscores the importance of assessing the implementation and impact of cultural heritage policies beyond macroeconomic data, focusing on the actual mechanisms at work within local contexts. These limitations hinder state actors' ability to effectively fulfil the goals of ICH governance, requiring that cultural actors independently seek out resources and support to safeguard their heritage. Second, our findings indicate two main ways for cultural actors to seek and obtain resources and support. One is to accumulate cultural capital to gain symbolic resources through the institutional recognition of state actors, such as being recommended as ICH inheritors, to improve their reputation and obtain advantageous positions both within and outside of the ICH field. The other way is to cross boundaries flexibly, depending on contexts, in order to acquire external resources from outside of the ICH field, such as the political and market fields, to accelerate the commercialisation of embroidery. In this semi-formal governance practice, state and cultural actors leverage each other to safeguard and better promote ICH.

This study also explores state-sponsored commercialisation, particularly in safeguarding ICH. Our analysis suggests that when commercialisation based on market logic proves unfeasible, a viable alternative may be to rely on state sponsorship. This perspective aligns with the inherent tension described by Bortolotto (2021) in the 'fuzziness principle', which contrasts the exclusivity of marketisation logic with the inclusivity of non-marketisation logic. Although marketisation typically focuses on exclusivity, commercialisation does not necessarily follow this pattern. In the state-sponsored commercialisation of Yuzhou embroidery, the state procures ICH-related products and services from intermediaries. It focuses on the social benefits these intermediaries provide, such as employment and skills training for rural poor households, rather than on personal or corporate profits. This approach highlights a significant shift from profit-driven market dynamics to a broader concern for social impact.

As previously analysed, state-sponsored commercialisation significantly supports entrepreneurial ICH inheritors, such as Zhao, by providing a robust development platform, social recognition, funding, and

access to potential embroidery workers. Also, this model may ensure the survival of both embroidery workers and ordinary ICH inheritors. Meanwhile, as it is sponsored by the state, it is likely to provide a specific survival space for simple, traditional skills (such as the primary embroidery method of Yuzhou embroidery: cross-stitch) to avoid their being eliminated by the market. The implications of such commercialisation are substantial for both the cultural transmission and governance of ICH such as Yuzhou embroidery. Upon closer examination of this particular traditional craft, it is evident that state-sponsored commercialisation could profoundly influence the culture and governance of such crafts and ICH more broadly. This observation aligns with the findings by Xu and Tao (2022a) regarding the cultural impacts of state intervention in traditional handicrafts.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise the pivotal role that Zhao has played in this context. The empirical evidence highlights two main strategies employed by cultural actors like Zhao in response to the limited resources provided by state actors: the accumulation of cultural capital and the crossing of identity boundaries, especially when she combined the development of Yuzhou embroidery with nationally significant strategies. These strategies offer fresh insights into cultural actors' autonomy and multifaceted roles in safeguarding and utilising ICH, underscoring their critical involvement in navigating and shaping the commercialisation landscape.

Finally, while we emphasise the mitigation of market pressures through state-sponsored commercialisation, it is important to acknowledge the internal tensions inherent in this model, which is influenced by semi-formal cultural governance. On the one hand, intermediaries positioned at the node of state and society possess the opportunity and conditions to execute strategic actions; however, their autonomy remains constrained within the boundaries defined by national strategies. On the other hand, an unbalanced interest relationship exists between ordinary ICH producers and these intermediaries. The producers, who create the bulk of the ICH products, often receive fewer economic rewards than the intermediaries, highlighting a significant disparity in the distribution of benefits within this framework that should be investigated in future research. 

## Appendix: Interviewee profiles

Interview number	Interviewee	Gender	Age	Date of interview	Profession
1	A	Male	40–49	29 April 2020	Director of the ICH office of the county cultural centre
2	A	Male	40–49	23 June 2020	Director of the ICH office of the county cultural centre
3	A	Male	40–49	24 June 2020	Director of the ICH office of the county cultural centre
4	A	Male	40–49	14 July 2020	Director of the ICH office of the county cultural centre
5	B	Male	40–49	14 July 2020	Officer of the county cultural bureau
6	C	Male	60–69	10 July 2020	Former head of the township cultural centre
7	D	Male	60–69	17 July 2020	Former director of the county cultural centre
8	E	Male	20–29	8 July 2020	Officer of the county human resources and social security bureau
9	F	Female	20–29	8 July 2020	Officer of the county human resources and social security bureau
10	J	Female	40–49	8 July 2020	Officer of the county human resources and social security bureau
11	H	Male	50–59	8 July 2020	Officer of the county disabled persons' federation
12	I	Female	20–29	8 July 2020	Officer of the county commerce bureau
13	J	Female	30–39	8 July 2020	Officer of the county women's federation
14	K	Female	40–49	27 June 2020	General manager of Yuzhou Embroidery Company, municipal-level ICH inheritor
15	K	Female	40–49	28 June 2020	General manager of Yuzhou Embroidery Company, municipal-level ICH inheritor
16	K	Female	40–49	28 June 2020	General manager of Yuzhou Embroidery Company, municipal-level ICH inheritor
17	L	Female	40–49	27 June 2020	Manager of embroidery shop, embroidery artisan
18	M	Female	30–39	30 June 2020	Township resident, former embroidery artisan
19	N	Female	30–39	30 June 2020	Township resident, embroidery artisan
20	O	Female	50–59	30 June 2020	Township resident, former embroidery artisan
21	P	Female	50–59	29 June 2020	Township resident, municipal-level ICH inheritor
22	Q	Female	30–39	30 June 2020	Township resident, former embroidery artisan
23	R	Female	40–49	30 June 2020	Township resident, former embroidery artisan

## ENDNOTES

1. Wang Wenzhang is the former Vice Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China (2008–2012). *An Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by Wang, is not only a textbook used by many universities, but also a training material for cultural cadres responsible for ICH.
2. 'Shangmian qian tiao xian, xiamian yigen zhen' (上面千条线, 下面一根针) describes the situation where many affairs arise from the upper-related organisations, but only one person is employed in the lowest-ranked organisation to deal with those affairs.
3. These two stages are logically sequential and often intersect in reality.
4. Interview with community residents, No. 17-22 July 2020.

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