

## **Research proposal : Topic 2: ‘Cultural assets’**

### **Case Study: Naxi Hand Made Paper: the sacred and the profane**

By Dr. Maruja Salas,

CBIK researcher

#### **Introduction**

CBIK is a Non Gvt. Organization dedicated to the support and enhancement of Indigenous Knowledge and bio-diversity. The main focus of its research is the inextricable link between the ethnic minorities cultures and their ways of dealing with nature. After the CUBIC (July 2000) it has acknowledged that the cosmovisions of ethnic minority peoples are an important cultural resource with important implications for resource use and livelihoods.

At the same time, in recent years, the Provincial Government has launched strategies aiming to turn Yunnan into a ‘Great Cultural Province’ and a ‘Green Economy Province’. The former strategy has given great support to the development of tourism in ethnic minority areas, as economic “pillar industries” for the next 20 years. The latter, promotes the greening of Yunnan’s landscape with commercial plantations of rubber, sugar cane , pineapple among other bio-resources. In many cases, indigenous knowledge of resources link with small- scale use and production is being affected by bio-prospecting and the development of mass tourism.

CBIK is concerned with the future of indigenous knowledge and practices. Therefore, it is important to gain insights about how to plan actions jointly with the village partners, actions to broaden a space to access further rights regarding the use of resources.

#### **Theory**

This case study focuses on hand made paper as cultural assets. It fits with the overall theme of **membership** as the identification of cultural assets as potential tourist includes certain products and excludes others. Moreover, as a once banned cultural product now it is facing a new way of inclusion in the official understanding of the cultural diversity of Yunnan. The Dongba -papers are being brought into the mainstream development discourses.

Given the provincial government’s two strategies outlined above, the appropriation of the Dongba-scripts, has become a new way in which these and the Naxi culture, are being included in the state and state-promoted processes of development. In this context, the preservation, adaptation, packaging and marketing of these cultural assets mobilize a new set of resources and actors who interact indifferent socio-economic networks created by the modern tourist development.

#### **Problem**

Hand-made paper was exclusively used for the sacred Dongba scripts. The paper was produced by the Dongba themselves or in some Naxi villages near Lijiang using Stringbush, (*Wiekstroemia* sp) a highland endemic plant. Each paper maker had his own secret knowledge about specific technological procedures and the various plant resources used in the transformation of row material into paper. Now, the market is flooded with Dongba scripts, they have become tourism products. There are several paper makers in

Lijiang, who provide the local artists, boutiques, and tourists with different qualities of paper. In recent years private companies as well as the local government are promoting hand made paper and important commodity.

One paper maker, from the village Keipegu has refused to cooperate with the demands of the local company and the local government to provide his services in the production of tourism products. This has raised a set of issues concerning intellectual property rights and the depletion of Stringbush in the highland of Lijiang .

### **Research objectives, questions and methods**

Having outlined the focus problem the research objectives are four:

Objective No 1:

To understand the discourse of tourism development and the meaning it is attributed to ‘naxi paper ’ based on indigenous cultural resources.

Following questions will guide the exploration of this objective :

- how has ‘indigenous knowledge’ been identified by different actors involved in the tourism development and how the above mentioned government policies identified, valued and ascribed roles to the Naxi hand made paper?

Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews with official and private tourist bureaus and scholars in Lijiang and Kunming

Objective No 2:

To identify the different actors involved in hand paper making,

This objective will be explored through the questions:

- How the different actors perceive, value, and use the hand made paper? How these perceptions are intertwined with the market development and how it impacts the availability of plant resources?

Methods:

- In depth interviews with following persons in Lijiang:
  - Dongba priests
  - Members of the Dongba Research Institute
  - Dongba Students
  - Paper makers in Lijiang, Daju, and Keipegu
- mapping of the locations in Lijiang where Dongba papers are sold
- flow chart of the use of plant resources from the perspective of different actors

- matrix of plant resources used in paper making with trends of availability of the resources in a time frame

### Objective 3.

To explore the visions of the future related to the plant resources from the point of view of the different actors.

Following question will help to clarify this objective

- How different actors understand sustainability of resources in paper making as a cultural asset and what are their positions and how these relate to each other?

Methods: drawings of the future from

- the paper makers, (men and women)
- the Dongba students
- artists (men and women) that use hand made paper
- Traders (men and women) in Lijiang who sale Dongba scripts
- officers (men and women) from the Tourist development office in Kunming and Lijiang

### Objective 4

To analyze the limits and potentials of CBIK and the Naxi partners regarding the support of cultural resources for the benefit of the livelihoods of Naxi villagers.

This objective will be approached from the following questions:

- What are indigenous perceptions of Intellectual property rights? How can they be transformed into legal spaces for the appropriation, negotiation, resistance of the naxi papermakers?

Methods:

- Collection and analysis of literature about IPR and indigenous people.
- Semi structured Interview with a member the Office of Patents in Kunming.

### **Conclusions**

This case study will reveal the complexity involved in the promotion of cultural assets, in particular the products of indigenous knowledge. It might open new doors for finding strategies that will protect and defend the plant resources and the continuity of people's livelihoods and knowledge.