

# **The Chinese Paper-Cut: From Local Inventories to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

*Caroline Bodolec*

## **1 Introduction**

On December 2, 2004, China became the sixth country to ratify the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2011, the country held the largest number of elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (29 of a world total of 232) and on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (7 of 27).<sup>1</sup> This can be seen as another expression of the international cultural “Soft Power” of China (Huang 2006, Kurlantzick 2007, Li 2009), but it would miss the national impact of the UNESCO Convention. The translation of the concepts into the Chinese cultural laws has had profound consequences for all the elements now called Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The first part of this article presents the modifications of the Chinese administrative structure subsequent to the ratification of the 2003 Convention (Wang 2010). This highlights some of the ideological concepts mobilized by the government to integrate the previous cultural policies. In the same way, it is important to see how the convention principles were read and interpreted through actual national ideology, as, for instance, the *hexie shehui* 和谐社会, the “harmonious society.” In the second part, the example of the Chinese paper-cut practice, a form of popular art performed predominantly by wom-

---

<sup>1</sup> cf. UNESCO 2011a.

en, is considered in order to reveal the compiling of the files, starting with a local survey to the inscription on the UNESCO Representative List. Based on information gathered during my ethnographic researches in Shaanxi province since 1995 (Bodolec 1999, 2005, 2010a, 2010b, 2012) and the study of provincial and national ICH lists, the analysis aims at presenting the channels of communication and the role of the actors at every step of the process. The purpose is to examine how the new international concept of ICH can affect local cultural policy.

## 2 The Popular Republic of China and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Only four months after the ratification of the UNESCO Convention on March 26, 2005, the Chinese State Council decreed a Recommendation to Intensify the Protection of National Intangible Cultural Heritage.<sup>2</sup> This document also announced the government projects of national inventories and of a National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage which constitute the core of the Chinese action plan for the implementation of the 2003 Convention. Until this date, cultural heritage was associated with the National Bureau of Cultural Heritage,<sup>3</sup> but in order to show the importance given to the new concepts, a special organization was established.

### 2.1 Modifications of the Administration of Culture in China

The recommendation created the Interdepartmental Meeting for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage,<sup>4</sup> a temporary organization directly responsible to the State Council. It was composed of vice-directors of important administrations, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Planning, the National Board for Reforms and Development, the National Board for Minority Affairs, the National Bureau of Religious Activities, the National Bureau of Tourism, and the Ministry of Budget. A centralized management was intended which is clearly linked with the difficulties of administrative divisions for the Chinese sites of the World Heritage List. The management of these sites is the responsibility of local government but they are also subject to regulations of the various ministries (Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Culture, and sometimes National Bureau of Religious Affairs). The dialogue between the various administrations is not regulated and can lead to difficulties in site manage-

<sup>2</sup> *Guowu yuan baogongting guanyu jiaqiang woguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu gongzuo de yijian* 国务院办公厅关于加强我国非物质文化遗产保护工作的意见<sup>n°guoban</sup> 国办 [2005] 18, March 26, 2005, published in *Guowu yuan gongbao* 国务院公报, n°4, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *Guojia wenwu ju* 国家文物局.

<sup>4</sup> *Feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu gongzuo bu jikanxihui yizhidu* 非物质文化遗产保护工作部际联席会议制度.

ment. This is clearly the case when the touristic interest takes precedence over cultural integrity at the risk of displeasing UNESCO (Xie 2004: 35–37). Funding came primarily from local government and the national guidelines are not always considered. The establishment of an Interdepartmental Meeting as a single manager aims to avoid the problems of split jurisdiction. It also expressed that the Central Government put considerable importance on this issue, looking for the most effective solutions.

When it was created, the Interdepartmental Meeting was associated with an existing department of the Ministry of Culture, the Department for Social Culture and Library Administration,<sup>5</sup> which is in charge of popular culture and ethnological research through an extensive network of cultural centers.<sup>6</sup> Each district in China has a cultural center with one or more official state ethnologists. They are usually native to the region, fully aware of the local culture and have close contacts with the population. This had great importance in the rapid development of inventories of cultural practices as of the third quarter of 2005.

In March 2008, the Interdepartmental Meeting for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage was officially replaced by a permanent organization: The Intangible Cultural Heritage Division.<sup>7</sup> Established within the Ministry of Culture, it is no longer connected with the Department of Social Culture and the local cultural centers. Its main partners are now the provincial cultural administrations.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Shehui wenhua chu* 社会文化处.

<sup>6</sup> *Wenhua guan* 文化馆.

<sup>7</sup> *Feiwuzhi wenhua yichan si* 非物质文化遗产司. This name was added to the Social Heritage Bureau in 2007 but without a special budget and without the creation of positions (Wang 2010: 187).



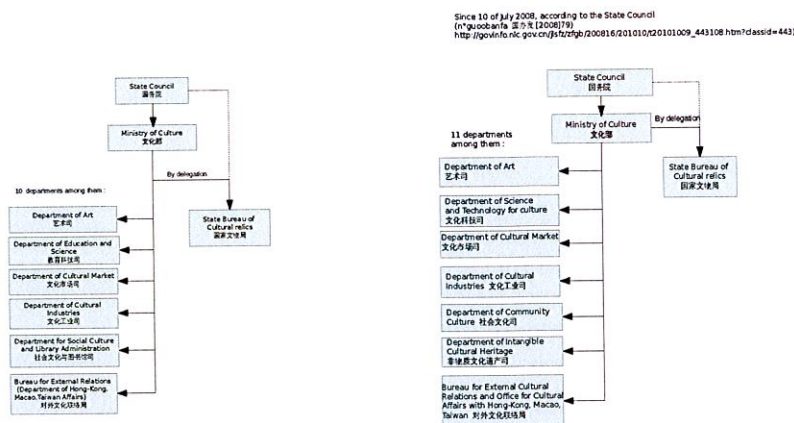


Figure 1, left: The Organization of the Chinese Ministry of Culture before 2008  
(Chinese Government n.d.).

Figure 2, right: The Organization of Chinese Ministry of Culture since 2008  
(Chinese Government n.d.).

The new institution has three sections: Management, Protection and the General Secretariat,<sup>8</sup> to meet its numerous missions. In line with UNESCO requirements, the ICH division manages the safeguarding of projects and the National Representative List of ICH (file evaluations and elections); it also prepares the national protection policies and the legislative regulations. More surprisingly, the division deals with “the transmission and popularization of elements of excellence of national Chinese culture.” The definition of this “national culture,” as well as the elements included in it, have been constantly modified since the end of the 19th century in order to match the current political situations (Wang 1997). By this decree, the newly created division is now responsible for this aspect, which is important for the harmony of the country. Furthermore, for the first time, the term “excellence” appears in official policy papers. It is meant to – in contradiction of the UNESCO Conventions’ principles – sort among the cultural and social practices of China. Only some of them will be worthy of being considered part of the Chinese national culture.

<sup>8</sup> *Guanli chu* 管理处, *baohu chu* 保护处, *bangong shi* 办公室.

## 2.2 From the Study of Folk Culture to the Recognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements

The Chinese government did not wait for the UNESCO Convention to take an interest in local cultures. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, rural practices were set as an example for the new socialist society. In addition, as of 1953, the Central Ethnic Affairs Commission began to organize anthropologists, ethnologists and, more generally, researchers on minority areas to do fieldwork on minority languages and practices. This project, called Ethnic Groups Recognition,<sup>9</sup> led to the establishment of the 55 minority designations in China (7% of the population in 60% of the territory) and permitted the publication of numerous books and documentaries (Fei 1980, Wang 1997, Liu 2003). This large investigation was, however, marred by the political ideology of the time: Studying these populations, "the other ones," was to lead them to socialism and modernity (Baptandier 2001). By studying and popularizing the minorities' cultural practices, the Chinese scholars participated in the creation of a "new united nation" after 1949. However, they also contributed to the construction of the Han Chinese majority discourse of modernity and progress by focusing the researches on the most "primitive" and "colorful" costumes (Gladney 1994, Liu 2012). The minorities have played the role of an "internal orientalism" (Schein 1997, Allès 2011). During this period, studies of popular practices concentrated almost exclusively on minorities, neglecting the incredible diversity of practices of the Han nationality (95% of the population).

The Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and early-1970s rejected cultural and popular practices: Numerous artifacts, objects and instruments were destroyed. Some knowledge owners also suffered the throes of this period as representatives of the old culture to be eliminated (Clark 2008, King 2010). It was not until the 1980s that some intellectuals and, thereafter, cultural authorities developed renewed interest in these issues. A new program of investigation was organized as of 1980, based on the 1950s' inventories, but rather focused on music and literature. In 2006, the 298 volumes of *Collection of ethnic and popular art and literature*<sup>10</sup> were published under the supervision of the Central Ethnic Affairs Commission and the National Confederation of Art and Literature Associations. This collection was one of the most important cultural projects since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (Wang 2010).

Since the 1990s, in addition to those national actions, China has been involved in international reflections on popular culture. China has closely followed the debates with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and UNESCO since the late-1970s and early-1980s (Wang 2010). China was particularly interested

<sup>9</sup> *Minzu shibie* 民族识别.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhongguo minzu minjian wenyi jicheng zhi* 中国民族民间文艺集成志.



by the 1989 "Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore," which was the first legal instrument of its kind oriented towards the safeguarding of ICH. Reacting quickly, from 1990 onwards, the Chinese government prepared several legal projects; some were presented at the Popular National Assembly, entitled "Law for the protection of ethnic and popular cultures," "Law for the protection of oral and intangible heritage" and "Law for the protection of popular cultures." The proposals mingled elements of the UNESCO regular reports and recommendations, and Chinese national principles of heritage protection. A regulation was promulgated, for example, to define what practices should be safeguarded (a historical tradition of 100 years needed to be proven) and how to protect them (such as the measure for the transmitters of knowledge<sup>11</sup> or the creation of a label of excellence<sup>12</sup>) (State Council 1997).

It was only in August 2002 that the Ministry of Culture introduced an official law project to the National Popular Assembly. It was about to be approved in November 2002 when the UNESCO Convention was passed. The project was taken to incorporate the new principles of the Convention but without giving up certain items such as excellence which will be discussed below.

### 2.3 The Chinese Law to Protect the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of China

The new law project was completed in March 2006 and was submitted to the State Council for approval in 2007, but it was not promulgated until February 25, 2011, and came into force on June 1, 2011.<sup>13</sup> Between the two dates, an interim law was enacted on November 26, 2006.<sup>14</sup> The texts present the essence of what are, for the Chinese government, the values of ICH. They provide information about the Chinese interpretation of the UNESCO convention, especially the first and fourth articles<sup>15</sup>. They translate as follows:

Article 1. In order to carry forward the excellence of Chinese cultural traditions, to promote the spirit of the Chinese nation, to encourage the building of socialist spiritual and material civilization, to reinforce the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and preserve it, this law is formulated.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Measures for the Transmitters of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the National Level *guojia feiwuzhi wenhua yichan xiangmu daibiao xing chuancheng ren* 国家级非物质文化遗产项目性传承人.

<sup>12</sup> Chinese Arts and Crafts Treasury *Zhongguo gongyi meishu zhenpin* 中国工艺美术珍品.

<sup>13</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan fa* 中华人民共和国非物质文化遗产法. The entire text of the law is available on the WIPO site [http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file\\_id=215504](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file_id=215504) <accessed December 20, 2011>.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (2006).

<sup>15</sup> The fourth article of the 2011 law was the third article of the Temporary Measures.

<sup>16</sup> 为了继承和弘扬中华民族优秀传统文化促进社会主义精神文明建设，加强非物质文化遗产保护、保存工作，制定本法.

Article 4. The protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage should respect its authenticity, its completeness and transmission; it is conducive to enhancing the Chinese national cultural identity, to safeguard national identity and national unity and to promote social harmony and sustainable development.<sup>17</sup>

The terms of the two texts are almost exactly the same, but it is worth noticing that some parts of the sentences were put in a different order. In the first article of the law, for example, the words “carry forward the excellence of Chinese cultural tradition” were moved to the beginning of the paragraph in order to shift the emphasis. Chinese ICH would have the primary responsibility to promote what is the “excellence” of the Chinese culture. This concept of excellence or of outstanding value which was highlighted on the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2001–2003) was left out in the Convention of 2003 (Bortolotto 2008, 2011), so as to place emphasis on the equal recognition of expressions and traditions with no hierarchical distinctions among them. The concept of “outstanding universal value” embodied in the 1972 Convention does not, therefore, apply to the safeguarding of ICH. China emphasizes the excellence, and this has consequences for practices less consistent with the state ideology. A report of the XVIth General Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2007 provides us with clues. While the ICH is seen as a way to participate in the construction of a “Spiritual Home of Chinese Nation,”<sup>18</sup> this heritage also has to reactivate the principle of distinction between “the essence and the scrap.” This sentence came from a Mao Zedong speech of 1940 on culture at Yan’an (Zedong 1940).<sup>19</sup> Originally concerning the Communist Party’s attitude in the face of occidental culture and Chinese popular culture, the distinction between the essence (excellence) and scrap (the other practices) has now been updated. Actually, no public document describes the criteria for distinguishing an “excellent” ICH practice from the others. A careful examination of the files elected on the Chinese (provincials and national) and UNESCO lists allows us to gradually extract those criteria and understand where the break between “excellence” and “scrap” occurs.<sup>20</sup>

ICH also holds great importance for the national unity and identity, as stated in article 4 of the law. One expression is particularly accurate on this subject: the promotion of “social harmony.” Obviously, this can be related to the important ideological concept of “harmonious society,” developed by President Hu Jintao in 2005 and, since then, ubiquitous in political speeches. This corresponds to an ideal

<sup>17</sup> 保护非物质文化遗产，应当注重其真实性、整体性和传承性，有利于增强中华民族的文化认同，有利于维护国家统一民族团结，有利于促进社会和谐和可持续发展。

<sup>18</sup> *Jingshen jiayuan* 精神家园。

<sup>19</sup> Many thanks to Wang Li for this reference.

<sup>20</sup> This examination of the files is one of the task of the research group “Techniques et Patrimoine culturel immatériel en Chine (XVIe-XXIe siècles): formation, tradition, transmission” of the Centre d’études sur la Chine moderne et contemporaine (CECMC), UMR 8173 Chine, Corée, Japon (<http://cecmc.ehess.fr/> <accessed June 25, 2012>).



society where conflicts are absent and harmony reigns among all individuals. It is a discursive instrument in the construction of the Chinese nation, intended to unite all the nationalities around the idea of a large Chinese power (Frangville 2007, Boutonnet 2009). ICH is thus seen as a way to gather the entire Chinese population around its culture, and more precisely around its most remarkable elements.

### 3 The Paper-Cut File: An Example of the Selection Process of a Particular Intangible Cultural Heritage Element

The paper-cut file is one of those elements of excellence. It was, indeed, chosen to be one of the Chinese practices on the Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2009. However, before that, the file passed through several steps of selection. To reveal the compiling of the files, I chose the examples from the districts of Yanchuan 延川 and Ansai 安塞 in the north of Shaanxi province.

#### 3.1 From the Status of Popular Art to the Inscription on the Provincial List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The paper-cut of Shaanxi province, especially of the northern Shaanbei, was one of the first popular art forms valued by the government in the 1940s. The Communist Party took refuge there after the Long March in 1935 and was particularly interested in this type of art. However, the first inventories made during the 1950s revealed that farmers in every part of the country cut paper for decorative or ritual purposes with quite different techniques (scissors or knife) and designs. Exhibitions stopped during the Cultural Revolution, but the practice was never prohibited. The patterns changed and became more political.

In the districts mentioned above, the situation changed in 1973 with the arrival of Jin Zhilin 靳之林 (born in 1928) at the head of the Cultural Center of Yan'an prefecture (Bodolec 2012).<sup>21</sup> He made inventories of the artist-farmers of the thirteen districts of the area and organized some exhibitions in Xi'an, capital of the province. In 1978, with the economic reforms and a new interest in popular arts and practices, matters grew to a different scale. The state officers in every district made inventories of local artists especially in paper-cut and embroidery. The results are impressive: In the district of Ansai, 20,000 women declared that they were engaged in paper-cut activity and about 5,000 could be qualified as experts.<sup>22</sup> Among them, forty were ceremoniously designated to transmit their technique.

<sup>21</sup> *Yan'an diqu wenhua guan* 延安地区文化馆.

<sup>22</sup> *jianzhi nengshou* 剪纸能手.



They were named “artist–farmer chosen to be the seeds”<sup>23</sup> and were encouraged to transmit the oldest patterns of paper-cut that tell the myths of their villages.

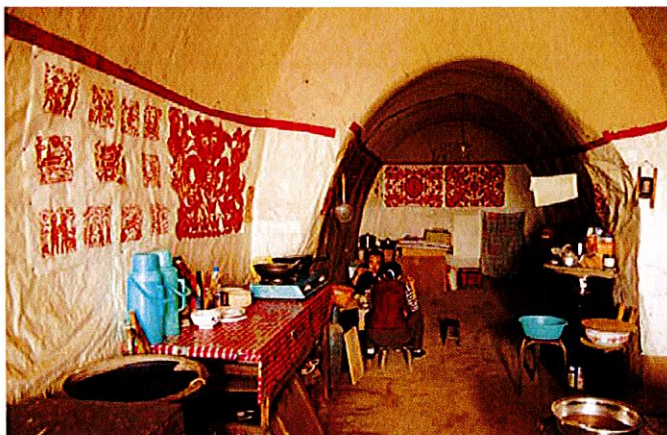


Figure 3: Paper-cut in a yaodong house, Xiaocheng village, Yanchuan district, Shaanxi province (Bodolec 2009).

The first national and, thereafter, international exhibitions were organized at the beginning of the 1980s. In 1986, Jin Zhilin was appointed to the head of the Popular Art Chair at the Central Academy of Fine Arts at Beijing. He was also the first director of the Popular Art Research Center.

Less than 20 years later, this very same Central Academy of Fine Arts was in charge of the application of Chinese Folk Paper-Cutting for the UNESCO Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity list. The Masterpieces program was established between 2001 and 2005 in order to draw attention to the most outstanding examples of ICH. There were three proclamations (2001, 2003 and 2005) and 90 elements were elected. This program of Masterpieces was stopped in 2005 and all the elements were integrated in the Representative List and the Urgent Safeguarding List in 2008. Four Chinese practices were elected as Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity and several other applications presented, like the Chinese paper-cut, were rejected. However, the preparation of the case took four years and the Yan'an region, particularly the population of Yanchuan district, was involved in it. A book containing the collective actions and many articles from local and national experts on paper-cut were even published to support this application (Qiao 2005). After the failure, the application file was completely revised and had to follow the procedures put in place by the Minis-

<sup>23</sup> *Nongmin yishu jia de zhongji xuanshou* 农民艺术家的种子选手.  
[http://www.trshw.com/art\\_show.asp?nameid=63&id=111](http://www.trshw.com/art_show.asp?nameid=63&id=111) <accessed June 6, 2011>.

try of Culture: In particular, the organization of a new survey of the practice. From that time, artists and local experts were no longer involved in the case.

Indeed, by ratifying the Convention of 2003, nation-states agree to establish a survey of all the practices within the ICH field in its territory. In China, the Circular of June 9, 2005,<sup>24</sup> was sent by the Ministry of Culture to the provincial administrations. We learn that the survey was meant to be completed by the end of 2008 and aimed at establishing a general database and a cartography of Chinese ICH.<sup>25</sup> The provincial plans for safeguarding and protection were to be based on the survey results (Wang 2010).

The first step was the sending of an Operational Manual<sup>26</sup> to the provincial administrations. The cultural division of Shaanxi issued a work program in May 2006<sup>27</sup> and organized a first training course for the district's cultural center officers and experts (folklorists, ethnologists, local historians, art experts, etc.) in August of the same year. The courses were led by the experts who drafted the manual. Offered throughout the regions, this training ensured a unified methodology in every district.

The district team planned a survey schedule and field studies in villages were organized. The investigators conducted interviews following the manual and according to the categories defined by the previous inventories (1953 and 1980). Nonetheless, it seems that it was possible to add elements not mentioned in the earlier inventories. The information gathered was used to write reports for the provincial administration. As the Operational Manual and the survey contents are not accessible to the public,<sup>28</sup> only a few indications by local informants allow one to know that video and audio records, photographs and sometimes artifacts and ancient documents were added in the reports. However, a website was created to make visible the provincial actions for the ICH.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2 From the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage to UNESCO Recognition

The Shaanxi website presents all the official information available on ICH practices in every district of the province. The two proclamations on the Shaanxi ICH

<sup>24</sup> *Circular from the Ministry of Culture on the Way to Carry out the Survey of Intangible Cultural Heritage* *Wenbua bu gongting guanyu kaizhan feiwuzhi wenhua yichan pucha gongzuo de tongzhi* 文化部公厅关于开展非物质文化遗产普查工作的通知, n° *wenbanshetu fa* 文办社图法 [2005] 21.

<sup>25</sup> In November 2008, only 40% of the provincial inventories were finished; but it is said that all of them were finished by the end of 2009 (Wang 2010).

<sup>26</sup> *Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan pucha shouce* 中国非物质文化遗产普查手册. Operational Manual was the official translation provided by Chinese delegation to UNESCO (Wang 2010).

<sup>27</sup> *Shaanxi sheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan pucha gongzuo shishi fangan* 陕西省非物质文化遗产普查工作实施方案 [Shaanxi province survey work program for the Intangible Cultural Heritage], May 26, 2006. *Shaanwenshe* 陕文社 [2006] 22.

<sup>28</sup> It is said that, ultimately, a general database should allow access to the survey data.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.snwh.gov.cn/feiwuzhi/index.htm> <accessed December 22, 2011>.



List are published, in addition to an interactive map. Those lists are the result of a choice made by a committee of experts among the hundreds of reports sent in by the districts. The criteria of choice were not public and no element was given to justify the ranking. The first proclamation, made in 2007, selected 165 practices, and the second, in 2009, 165 more. Six different files were elected for the art and techniques of the paper-cut (*jianzhi* 剪纸): one in 2007<sup>30</sup> and five in 2009<sup>31</sup> gathered from all parts of Shaanxi province.

The description of each paper-cut practice is, however, very succinct. In the case of Yanchuan district, the file contains ten pages and a movie.<sup>32</sup> There were no photographs to present the patterns and it is obvious that the text sought to place paper-cut techniques into a story that would make them as old as China itself and incorporate the recent election onto the UNESCO ICH list with the previous cultural policies for popular art. The practice is not seen in its social and ritual environment. According to the file, the only people – essentially women – involved in the technique are the “transmitters of knowledge” (*chuancheng ren* 传承人) who must be mentioned in the ICH program. In addition, a five-year plan for safeguarding and development is presented. This file seems very thin compared to the very rich artistic activity in Yanchuan district and the richness of the survey made in the villages. There is no reference to the events linked with the UNESCO Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity application in 2005.

The provincial administration then made a selection of practices to apply for the National List. The shortlist was forwarded to the national authority in charge of ICH and each file was considered by an expert committee for each domain of ICH. The committees made a provisional list to be discussed. The last step before publication on the website was the approbation by the State Council.<sup>33</sup> Up to now, three announcements have been made: 2006 (518 practices), 2008 (510 practices) and June 11, 2011 (191 practices).<sup>34</sup> In 2006, Shaanxi province succeeded in electing 21 elements including the paper-cut, but at the expense of its local specificities. Indeed, the national file named “paper-cut” is, in fact, the accumulation of different techniques and patterns from nine places: four in the North of China and three in the South;<sup>35</sup> a national minority is involved with three of them (Mandchous and

<sup>30</sup> *Dingbian jianzhi yishu* 定边剪纸艺术 [The art of paper-cut in Dingbian district].

<sup>31</sup> *Xunyi caitie jianzhi* 旬邑彩贴剪纸 [Paper-cut with color inclusion of Xunyi district]; *Yanchuan jianzhi* 延川剪纸 [Paper-cut of Yanchuan district]; *Yongshou minjian jianzhi* 永寿民间剪纸 [Popular paper-cut of Yongshou district]; *Luochuan jianzhi* 洛川剪纸 [Paper-cut of Luochuan district] and *Huangling jianzhi* 黄陵剪纸 [Paper-cut of Huangling district].

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.snwh.gov.cn/feiwuzhi/sjep/mjms/5/201112/t20111208\\_124620.htm](http://www.snwh.gov.cn/feiwuzhi/sjep/mjms/5/201112/t20111208_124620.htm)

As far as we know, the video space exists but no link with a video <accessed December 22, 2011>.

<sup>33</sup> *Temporary Measures for the Protection and the Management of the Elements on the National List*, 2006, op. cit. art. 9, 12, 13, 16 and 17.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ihchina.cn/main.jsp> <accessed December 22, 2011>.

<sup>35</sup> District of Yu 蔚县 in Hebei; Mandchous autonomous district of Fengning 丰宁满族自治县 in Hebei; District of Zhongyang 中阳 in Shanxi; Yiwulü shan Mandchous region 医巫闾山满族地区 in

Dai). Shaanxi province was then only one example among others chosen to represent the “Chinese Paper-Cut” in the National List. The selection criteria for this list are very specific and follow the general policy for the ICH:<sup>36</sup> Notably, to be of outstanding value (criterion 1). Surprisingly, the Shaanxi province case concerns the district of Ansai whose paper-cut practice is not in the Shaanxi list of ICH. We can only speculate on how a file never inscribed in a provincial list was able to be elected in the National List and, moreover, as we will see, in the prestigious Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The main reason is probably due to a problem of schedule: In order to apply for the first proclamation of Chinese National List of ICH, the provinces had to send the files before September 2005 when the survey had not yet begun (Wang 2010). As the Ansai district was well-documented, its well-known paper-cut practices could help to fill in the gap quickly.

The Chinese applicants for the two UNESCO lists were chosen from among the elements of the National List and only among them. The exact procedures and criteria are not public. No reasons are given for why particular elements were chosen, and the decisions are final. In 2009, a nomination of the Chinese Paper-Cut was presented for inscription on the Representative List of ICH. The file is based on the National List with the same nine places described, including the Ansai district. However, the groups and transmitters of knowledge are more visible. It should be noted that the majority of the safeguarding measures and actions with the communities described happened in Shaanxi province and especially in Yanchuan district, which was not mentioned as a special paper-cut place.<sup>37</sup> At the time of the UNESCO nomination, the Shaanxi survey was finished, two provincial list proclamations were made and Ansai still did not appear on a list. Field research indicates that this was ill perceived by Yanchuan people who had been involved in the survey as well as in the exhibitions and symposium organizations since at least 2001 (Bodolec 2012). The benefits of the UNESCO nomination (safeguarding program supports, artistic events and international recognition) are then reaped by another district which may have discouraged some members of the local elite to invest in cultural activities.

## 4 Conclusion

As shown by the case-study of paper-cut, the ICH practices have to pass through several filters from the district surveys to the provincial and national commissions

---

Liaoning; City of Yangzhou 扬州 in Jiangsu; City of Leqing 乐清市 in Zhejiang; Province of Guangdong 广东; Dai nationality 傣族 in Yunnan; and District of Ansai 安塞, Shaanxi.

<sup>36</sup> *Temporary Measures for the Selection of Candidates on the National List of Representative Works of ICH Guojia ji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiao zuo shenbao pingding zanzing banfa* 国家级非物质文化遗产代表申报评定暂行办法, March 26, 2005, Art. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Particularly the actions for the UNESCO Masterpieces applications that were mentioned above (UNESCO application).



in order to be enhanced. The political and ideological importance of ICH concepts within the national policies were particularly taken into account at every stage. With the implementation of the 2003 Convention, the legal apparatus and administrative organization of the Chinese state have been modified, an extensive survey was made, and many events were organized to publicize and enforce the political importance of this new cultural concept. A big effort is actually being provided to study, publicize and promote the cultural and social practices of the whole country. This is not only to show the world that China holds important cultural resources, but also to strengthen the notion of unity and national culture within its own society.

In recent years, the concept of ICH has become a very important paradigm in the cultural life in China. The prospect of having a practice elected in the provincial, the national or even in the UNESCO list underlies every cultural activity. It is certain that a choice is made when certain practices are more in the political line than others. The creation of the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture in 2008 follows this direction. This department does not have any further connection with the district cultural centers and local ethnographers. However, one of its main functions is to steer the work of inheriting and disseminating the essence of national culture.<sup>38</sup> Recently, the focus on the “excellence of Chinese cultural traditions” in the 2011 law on ICH may produce a sort of cleaning among the cultural and social practices of China.

Although it is still too early to realize all the impacts of this new concept in the field, some aspects are to be carefully observed. Indeed, for the moment, the communities and groups are only superficially involved in the investigation and local development of the ICH practices. It is sometimes difficult to find information in the files presented for the UNESCO inscriptions on how the communities have participated in the nomination process and how customary practices governing access to specific aspects of the elements would be respected. Information is lacking to identify the bearers, practitioners and community concerned more clearly and to explain its current social functions, transmission methods and cultural significance to that community (UNESCO 2011b). The files available on the provincial and national websites do not put the practices back in the social, cultural and ritual context. The social interaction and tensions between the community members are not described nor are the divergences on practice interpretations.

Another aspect that deserves to be watched carefully is how the practices are valued by provincial authorities, in particular by the tourism industry. In China, where the domestic tourism is the main source of tourism revenue (70% of the total in 2004 with 1 billion visitors) (Goi 2007), the development of festivals and cultural

---

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.mcprc.gov.cn/English/jgsz/bjg/200904/t20090428\\_62711.html](http://www.mcprc.gov.cn/English/jgsz/bjg/200904/t20090428_62711.html) <accessed March 20, 2012>.

theme parks is a reality. The main question is how the ICH practices are presented to the public.

**Acknowledgments.** I would like to sincerely thank Wang Li for her help in understanding the Chinese legal apparatus.

## 5 References

- Allès, Elisabeth (2011): Un orientalisme intérieur. Les nationalités minoritaires en Chine. In *Après l'orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Orient*. François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds. Pp. 245-252. Paris: IISMM/Karthala.
- Baptandier, Brigitte (2001): En guise d'introduction: Chine et Anthropologie. *Atelier 24*: 9–27.
- Bodolec, Caroline (1999): Current Tendencies in Yaodong, Shaanbei. In *Proceedings of the 8th Conference of ACUUS. Associated Research Centers for Urban Underground Space*. Pp. 232–242. Xi'an, China.
- (2005): L'architecture en voûte chinoise: un patrimoine méconnu. Paris: Éditions Maisonneuve et Larose.
- (2010a) : Ershiyi shijie de yaodong: Shaanbei Yanchuan xian gongjiang chuantong jianzao jishu de xuexi yu chuancheng 二十一世纪的窑洞: 陕北延川县工匠传统建造技艺的学习与传承 [Building *yaodong* Houses in the XXIth Century: Craftsmen Training and Transmission of Knowledge in Yanchuan County, China]. In *Jishu, zhishi yu zhongguo jin xiandai xingye de shanbian 技技艺、知识与中国近、现代行业的嬗变* [Transformation of the Craft, Knowledge and Professions in Modern and Contemporary China]. Christian Lamouroux 蓝克利, ed. Pp. 3–19. Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe.
- (2010b): Houses as Local Culture Identity: The Case of Yanchuan District, Shaanxi. In *Along the Great Wall. Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia*. Erich Lehner, Alexandra Harrer, and Hildegard Sint, eds. Pp. 223–232. Vienna: Institute for Comparative Research in Architecture (ICRA).
- In press (2012): Décider ensemble du développement local: Le cas du musée des Arts et Traditions populaires de Nianpan (Shaanxi). In *Agir ensemble en Chine contemporaine*. Isabelle Thireau, ed. Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS.
- Bortolotto, Chiara (2008): Les enjeux de l'institution du patrimoine culturel immatériel. *Compte rendu du séminaire organisé au Lahic (2006-2008)*. *Culture et Recherche* 116-117: 32–34.
- (2011): Le patrimoine culturel immatériel. Enjeux d'une nouvelle catégorie. Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.



- Boutonnet, Thomas (2009): Vers une “société harmonieuse” de consommation? Discours et spectacle d'une Chine “civilisée” (1978-2008). Ph.D. dissertation. Etudes transculturelles, Institut d'Etudes Transtextuelles et Transculturelles, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 3.
- Chinese Government (n.d.): Chinese Government Public Information Online. [http://govinfo.nlc.gov.cn/jlsfz/zfgb/200816/201010/t20101009\\_443108.htm?classid=443](http://govinfo.nlc.gov.cn/jlsfz/zfgb/200816/201010/t20101009_443108.htm?classid=443) <accessed June 20, 2012>
- Clark, Paul (2008): *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fei, Hsiao-tung (1980): Ethnic identification in China. *Social Sciences in China* 1: 94–107.
- Frangville, Vanessa (2007): Construction nationale et spectacle de la différence en République Populaire de Chine. Ph.D. dissertation, Institut d'Etudes Transtextuelles et Transculturelles, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 3.
- Gladney, Dru C. (1994): Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53(1): 92–123.
- Goi, Isabelle (2007): Tourisme. In *Dictionnaire de la Chine contemporaine*. Thierry Sanjuan, ed. P. 257. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Huang, Yanzhong, and Sheng Ding (2006): Dragon's Underbelly: An Analysis of China's Soft Power. *East Asia* 23(4): 22–44.
- King, Richard, ed. (2010): *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966–1976*. Toronto: University of British Columbia Press.
- Kurlantzick, Joshua (2007): *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Li, Mingjiang (2009): *China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Liu, Lydia H. (2012): Translingual Folklore and Folklorics in China. In *A Companion to Folklore*. Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds. Pp. 190–210. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Liu, Mingxin (2003): A Historical Overview on Anthropology in China. *Anthropologist* 5(4): 217–223.
- Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China (2006): Temporary Measures for the Protection and the Management of the Elements on the National List. *Guojia ji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu yu guanli zanxing banfa* 国家级非物质文化遗产保护与管理暂行办法. Edict No. 39 of November 26, 2006.
- (2009): Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage. [http://www.mcprc.gov.cn/English/jgsz/bjg/200904/t20090428\\_62711.html](http://www.mcprc.gov.cn/English/jgsz/bjg/200904/t20090428_62711.html) <accessed March 20, 2012>
- Qiao, Xiaoguang, ed. (2005): Guanzhu Muqing he. *Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*. Minjian jianzhi Guoji xueshu yantaohui wenji 关注母亲河。中国非物质文化遗产。民间剪纸国际学术研讨会文集

- [Keeping A Close Eye on Our Mother River. Collection of Essays from the International Symposium of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of China and Chinese Paper-cutting]. The text of China Folk Paper-Cutting for Applying for UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Taiyuan, Shanxi: Renmin Chubanshe.
- Schein, Louisa (1997): Gender and Internal Orientalism in China. *Modern China* 23(1): 69–98.
- UNESCO (2011a): Intangible Heritage List.  
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011#tabs>  
 <accessed December 5, 2011>
- (2011b): Report of the Subsidiary Body on its work in 2011 and evaluation of nominations for inscription in 2011 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.  
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-11-6.COM-CONF.206-13-EN.pdf> <accessed June 27, 2012>
- Wang, Jianmin, ed. (1997): *Zhongguo minzu xue shi 中国民族学史* [The History of Ethnology in China], 2. Kunming: Yunan Jiaoyun Chubanshe
- Wang, Li (2010): La convention pour la sauvegarde du Patrimoine culturel immatériel et son application en droits français et chinois. Ph.D. dissertation, Droit public, Université Paris-Sud 11.
- Xie Ninggao 谢凝高 (2004): *Shijie yichan guanli tizhi zhi zheng de shizhi 世界遗产管理体制之争的实质* [Realities in the Management of World Heritage Sites]. *Lüyou xuekan 旅游学刊* [Tourism Tribune] 5: 35–37.
- Zetong, Mao (1940): *Qiqi zaopo, quqi jinghua 弃其糟粕取其精华*. In *Xin minzu zhuyi lun 新民主主义论* [The new democracy]. Speech on January 9, 1940. *Jiefang 解放* [Liberation], Yan'an, February 20: 198–199.