

Is Myth a Culture or a Religion? The Local Politics over the Cultural Resources among the Lahu in Yunnan, China

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Abstract

In China, after the end of the Cultural Revolution many scholars and government officials have actively protected the indigenous cultures which are in danger of extinction. Under the influence of the Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, ethnic cultures create the chance to make huge profits among several actors such as government officials, local scholars, ethnic elites and local people. In this paper, I will focus on the process of tourism development of the Lancang Lahu autonomous county in Yunnan province, which based on a motif of the creation myth of Lahu people. Then I will use the concept of resourcening culture and discuss how the activities of the county government face difficulties and tensions because of the failure of regional collaboration and the discordance with the locals.

Keywords: Resourcening culture, Cultural Resource, China, Lahu, Ethnic Minority

1. Preface

In China, since the 1980s, the ethnic cultures became an important object of discovery and re-evaluation. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, many scholars and government officials have rethought the importance of ethnic culture and have actively protected the indigenous cultures which are in danger of extinction. Under the influence of the Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, ethnic cultures create the chance to make huge profits among several actors such as government officials, local scholars, ethnic elites and local people. The Lahu, one of the ethnic groups living in southwestern China, is also such a case. The Lahu is not a famous ethnic group in China because of its mediocre status as the 24th largest population in 56 ethnic groups and lack of specific original “culture.” But since the 21st century the local government of the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County has aimed to use the myth of the Lahu to develop their region. They have intended to objectify, protect, and renovate the myth of the Lahu to suit development, and currently

Kathe development of the county is totally based on the myth. This trend was accelerated after the registration of the myth as Cultural Heritage. In this paper, I will describe the process of development based on the myth, and in using the concept of cultural resource, I will discuss how several actors interact toward profiting from the myth. Finally, I will reveal how their activities face difficulties and tensions in the Chinese context.

In the book named “Resourcanized Culture,” Yamashita and several scholars discuss where the usefulness of the concept “cultural resource” is. In the general definition, a “resource” means a thing which exists around us and is utilized by us for our needs [Moriyama 2007]. At the same time, culture is also ubiquitous, famously defined by Tylor as “the complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society” [Tylor 2010 (1871)]. In this sense, both resource and culture are ubiquitous things and they become apparent only when someone picks something up and names it as “culture” or “resource.” Shimizu points out that “culture” is an objectified term; everything which is named as culture has its own name other than culture [Shimizu 2007]. If so, what is the benefit of calling something a “cultural resource”?

The key point is a meta consciousness in which the thing is regarded as some kind of culture and usable as a resource. Comparing it with the similar term “cultural capital” by Bourdieu, Moriyama discusses the advantage of using the concept “cultural resource” [Moriyama 2007]. He said the concept of cultural capital presupposes a certain amount of time. Cultural capital is cultivated, constructed, maintained, and accumulated through time, and such time creates the class differentiation. On the contrary, the concept of cultural resource focuses more on synchronicity. The concept of cultural resource sheds light into the practices and actions of the people and reveals how a certain thing becomes a cultural resource in some specific situation.

In the process of resourcanizing culture, negotiations are often held on different levels of social systems such as local society, nation states or global markets. To describe such negotiations, we should focus on the questions of “who.” Who takes initiative and make whose culture for whom? These questions about “who” give us the way to describe the complicated dynamics of the politics surrounding cultural resources.

1.1 Authorization by Cultural Heritage

In many activities of resourcanizing culture, cultural heritage is one of the strongest registration

systems. The process of registration is the arena toward the authenticity of culture. Many actors negotiate who the representative of the culture is. In order to understand what kind of changes heritage brought to a society, social relationships, leadership, and the tension between surrounding societies are important. These discussions toward resourcanizing culture are not limited to only cultural heritage, but the social impact of cultural heritage becomes greater than the other cultural resources because it brings a huge budget and lots of tourists to the local area.

Iida and Kawai pointed out that the activity of cultural heritage is a form of coincided modernization [Iida and Kawai 2016]. Modernization premises ongoing change of the world, and in the process many customs quickly belong to the past. Something can be recognized as heritage only when the practitioners of it become a minority. In this sense, the system of cultural heritage is to find out the value in the past.

One feature of cultural heritage is its drastic change before and after registration. Although rarity is a condition for registration, there is the recognition that the culture changes drastically because of its powerful influence and popularity after the registration. The one main reason is its strong concern with tourism. Originally the concept of cultural heritage had nothing to do with tourism, but many success examples make cultural heritage the signboard of tourism development. Therefore, many people point out the value and originality of their culture in making appeals for the registration to develop their region.

The politics of cultural heritage become more complex in the case of intangible cultural heritage. According to the UNESCO definition, Intangible Cultural Heritage means: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship.¹ Unlike tangible heritage, intangible culture contains diverse versions and it is easily changeable and unstable. Therefore, in the process of registration, some sort of standardization and categorization is inevitable.

1.2 The Situation in China

China is the nation that contains the second most World Heritage sites in the world. Other than world heritage, the government actively registers national cultural heritage every year as a national project, and many regions, artists and ethnic groups competitively make appeals regarding their culture. Ethnic

¹ “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, In *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>> [accessed 19 January 2019]

groups in particular seem to be active in making appeals about the culture which represents them. It is based on ethnic nationalism, but also on pressure from the outside. China defines 55 ethnic minorities and these ethnic minorities are the representation of the diversity of China. On every national holiday, we can see all kinds of ethnic women in gorgeous ethnic dresses stand on the stage on TV. Every ethnic group is needed to show its originality for the diversity of China. However, such originality of every ethnic group is not natural but controversial. As many scholars already pointed out, the ethnic identification in China was carried out under the complex politics conditions of the early period of the PRC [Mōri 1998; Harrell 1995]. Throughout the identification process, many kinds of conditions are made such as sharing common language; region; economic life; culture etc [Fei 1989]. But the recognition of the local people had been respected more than other conditions. In some cases, an ethnic group was identified despite the cultural differences with the other surrounding groups not being clear (Tujia); the religion was the only factor of ethnicity (Hui); the people who originally had quite similar life styles and languages were divided into different groups, and so on. Therefore, many ethnic groups have actively tried to discover their own culture by means of their dress, dance, music and so on to present their originality, especially after the end of the Cultural Revolution. This preservation of ethnic culture gathered momentum under the support of the government.

Other than such pressures, several tensions over the politics of cultural heritage in China were reported. The first is de-religiousization [Sakurai et al 2011]. Under the philosophy of socialism, the Communist Party had been officially denied religion, and cultural heritages are also influenced by this implicit rule. Although currently this rule is relaxed and even some religious practices are registered as cultural heritage (e.g. Mazu religion), some local elites still become sensitive to the religious feature.

The second is regional competition [Kaneshige 2016]. Almost all ethnic groups in China live across the provinces, but some live in the ethnic autonomous areas and some do not. Normally, the ethnic autonomous regions have more chance to register their ethnic culture as cultural heritage and their compatriots who live outside of the region often cannot join the registry. It concerns the problem of who the representative of the culture is. The competitions directly link to the tensions regarding which region has the representatives of the ethnic group.

The last biggest tension is that, although this is not limited to China, cultural heritage is often based on commercialism rather than conservation and preservation. In many cases, many shops, restaurants, and hotels are built around the heritage site after the registration and a huge amount of tourists rush to the

area. The environment around the cultural heritage site and the daily life of local people is forced to change drastically. Many studies suggest how preservation and tourism can coexist [Chhabra et al 2003; Harrison and Hitchcock 2004; Alsayyad ed. 2013].

These tensions are occurring at different steps. The first two occur before the registration, and the latter happens after the registration. Throughout this process, many actors try to make/use the advantage of cultural heritage differently to achieve what they desire. In this paper, I will describe such complex interactions and, rather than suggest the solutions for the contradictions, I will discuss the multiple meanings of cultural heritage which arise in the process which surrounds it.

To approach a discussion on the politics of cultural heritage in China, we should pay attention to at least these three aspects: policy, representation and local practice [Iida and Kawai 2016: 9]. The policy is made by several levels of governments and nations, and it is the most powerful actor to guide the culture toward a specific direction. Representation means media and academics who decide how to make an appeal for the culture. It plays an important role for advertising the culture and it sometimes backs up the policy of the local government, but at the same time it can also expose a conflict between several actors toward the cultural heritage. It can be said to be in the intermediate position between several actors. Lastly, the local practices are the basis of the culture and cultural resources are not possible without the local practices. But it inevitably faces change and even new local practices are created in the process of resourcizing culture. In this sense, local practice is not only the source of cultural heritage but also the object to be created through cultural heritage. These three factors are not independent but exist in complex relations, so we should see the dynamic interaction to understand the phenomenon of cultural heritage.

In the following chapter, I will show the process of resourcizing Lahu culture. Then I intend to focus on the misunderstanding, contradiction, and discordance among the actors. In the Lahu case, the local elites of Lancang Lahu Autonomous County took strong initiative to build the characteristic Lahu culture through their oral literatures. But such intention faced several difficulties and it has not continued. Many other actors surrounding the cultural resource do not understand the intention of the elites and the effect of the movement. In the end, the cultural resource shows multiple meaning by each of the different actors.

2. The Lahu and the Myth

The Lahu is an ethnic group living in the mountainous borderlands in southwestern Yunnan,

northern Myanmar and Thailand. The total population is approximately 800,000 and more than half the population, about 480,000, is concentrated in Yunnan. Their main livelihood is slash-and-burn cultivation and paddy-field cultivation which are mixed depending on the geographical situation.

The current cross-border distribution of Lahu occurred because of the complex political situation on the borderlands [e.g. Kataoka 2007; Ma 2013]. Although the old written records of the Lahu are limited, their history has been described as a continuous southward migration. It is said that the Lahu originally lived in the northern part of Yunnan [Wang and He 1999]. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, several local Shan chieftains had governed the southern part of Yunnan and the Lahu also had been more or less under their rule. But since the 18th century, many Han laborers entered the mines in southern Yunnan and tensions with local people arose. Under the unstable relationships with outsiders, the local Shan chief was unable to maintain authority and several rebellions of mountainous people occurred. Kataoka discussed the arrival of Mahayana Buddhism to the Lahu area in the 19th century as having accelerated the politico-religious movement of Lahu. He pointed out that several Charismas had become the leaders of the Lahu [Kataoka 2007]. Since then, the name of Lahu (they were recorded as Luohei at that time) was written in the official documents. The Charisma movements and rebellions were finally suppressed by the Qing government and many Lahu escaped to the west and south. After that, in the early 20th century, the missionaries of the American Baptist Church arrived from Burma and many Lahu converted to Christianity. It was also not welcomed by the Chinese government, and many Christian Lahu crossed the border into Myanmar after the establishment of the PRC.

Southward mobility had been motivated by several political conditions, and its strong trigger was often the arrival of a new religion. Currently, the Lahu practice several religions such as Christianity, Animism, Buddhism, charisma cults and so on [Walker 2003; Nishimoto 2009]. Despite of the diversity, the supreme deities have the same name, *G'uisha*. Walker described the Lahu's idea of *G'uisha* as a supreme high divinity on the one hand but at the same time a diffused divine force encompassing several supernatural figures [Walker 1976]. This multi-sense of *G'uisha* leaves room for its conversion into other religions. Some animist Lahu in Yunnan told me that the Lahu practice many religions, but the base is the same; it is *G'uisha*. This idea of *G'uisha* often came out of the myth of Lahu, and it became the important motif of the cultural resource.

2.1 The Singing and Oral Literatures among Lahu

The Lahu had not had their own writing system until the early 20th century with the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Instead, they have cultivated rich oral literatures.

Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa, at present the most famous oral literature of Lahu, is now registered as National Intangible Cultural Heritage in China. That was the turning point for the Lahu people in Yunnan to develop their region based on this oral literature. The *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* means the creation (*hpa*) of the sky (*mvuh*) and earth (*mi*), this is the story of the creation of the world by the supreme god *G'uisha*. According to Walker, who conducted his fieldwork among Lahu mainly in northern Thailand, the most comprehensive version of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* was recorded in China [Walker ed. 1995: 16]. The Chinese scholars reported that this extremely long oral story needs a couple of nights to complete the singing, so normally it is sung only in the agricultural off-season [Lei and Liu 1999: 158]. They also pointed out that now only a few people can sing the whole story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. That is one of the strong reasons why *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* was registered as National Cultural Heritage.

Although the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is the most famous oral tradition, it should be understood in relation with other kinds of singing. The Lahu have many singing traditions; they enjoy antiphonal singing after the daily agricultural work. Sometimes it goes on late into the night despite their hard work in the daytime. Most of the songs are sung reciprocally; two people engage in a dialogue through singing.² The melody is simple and repeated, and the complex wording techniques are valued throughout the singing. Every Lahu traditional song uses long epic language and the words are lengthened in a four-syllable style. (The word *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is also in this manner; it is the variant of “*mvuh mi hpa ve*,” creating the world.) A middle-aged man told me the reason they use the lengthened words is that they want to stay with friends or lovers for a longer time.

According to the local category, the Lahu songs can be roughly divided into three types. The ones named *K'a mui hkaw*, are antiphonal songs which are sung by at least two persons, one after the other. The contents of *K'a mui hkaw* include love, agriculture, nature, the cycle of the seasons and so on. Traditionally, it was very common that youth gather near the bushes in the night and jointly sing *K'a mui hkaw* all night to select a lover in the agricultural off-season. The manner of this love song is that one singer always puts him/herself down and praises the opponent, and the other side repeatedly denies it and praises back to show

² This is except for the hymns and pop songs sung among Christian Lahu. About the pop songs of Lahu, see Nishimoto [2004].

his/her love. This is the manner to attract the opposite sex, and they compete with how beautiful the wording and allegory is. Other than love songs, elders sing about seasonal events or nature while farming, such as the matter of rice planting, harvesting and so on. Celebrating new marriage on the wedding day is also a big opportunity to sing *K'a mui hkaw*. Although younger generations gradually have difficulty to understand the special wording of *K'a mui hkaw*, many Lahu over 30 years old basically can sing *K'a mui hkaw*, or at least understand the meaning of *K'a mui hkaw*. (Some people hesitate to sing because his/her voice is not good, but they love to hear the *K'a mui hkaw*.) *K'a mui hkaw* has the freest style in the Lahu's traditional singing; the improvisation and skillfulness are praised.

The second type are ritual songs named *Ne hkaw* (spirit sounds) or *Maw hkaw* (the sounds of the spirit doctor). When a person becomes sick, a spirit doctor called *Mawpa* is invited to the patient's house. He (in many cases *Maw pa* is male) searches for the reason of the illness through divination and cures the patient through rituals. In the divination, he lights incenses on the hearth of patient's house and murmurs the names of suspicious spirits. When his word is right, the manifestation appears in his hand.³ After he find the causal agent, he enacts the rituals suited to the illness such as soul-calling (*ha hk'o ve*), sacrifice to an ancestor (*aw teh ve*), kicking out evil spirits from the house (*jaw ga ve*) etc. In these rituals, *Maw hkaw* is sung by *Mawpa*. If the causal agent is a small spirit, he only chants the short *Maw hkaw* without melody. But if a large ritual is needed, *Mawpa* sing *Maw hkaw* all through the night or day to correct the bad situation. The typical large rituals are "large-soul calling" called *ha lon ma h'ko*, and kicking out the evil spirits *jaw* from the house is called *jaw te ve*. In large soul-calling, the long travel story from a patient's house to the world of the dead is chanted in order to pull back the patient's soul. In the ritual of kicking out the *jaw*, the travel story from a patient's house to the God's land to find the strongest *Mawpa* who lives there is chanted. These long travel songs are important to materialize the rituals, and the proper form and proper sequence of wording is quite important. As with *K'a mui hkaw*, the melody of *Maw hkaw* is very simple and monotone, but contrary to *K'a mui hkaw*, no improvisation is required.⁴ The most important point to succeed in the ritual is the proper wording. Therefore, if *Mawpa* cannot continue singing because of sickness or being

³ To know the manifestation, *Maw pa* uses a tool such as throwing two blocks of wood or using white cloth and measuring the length by his hands two times, or just measuring the length from his wrist to his neck by hand. I never saw the divination using wood blocks, but when they use the white cloth and measure the length by hands, if the length is as same as the first time, it indicates the reason of patient's illness.

⁴ There is, of course, some differentiation by *Maw hpa*. In my field site, a lady in her late 70s told me that the *Maw hkaw* of the past greatest *Maw hpa* is the longest and more expressive than that of the current young *Maw hpa*. She said the young *Maw hpa* doesn't know the details of the stories, so they simplify the words.

drunk during the ritual, another person can substitute for him in so far as he knows the correct words.

The third type is the folktales named *chaw maw hkaw*, or *Ka law hkaw*. They are old folklores about subjects such as the birth of fire, animals and birds, and they also contain funny tales of a trickster. Although many books of *Ka law hkaw* are collections of short stories and do not contain the long story *Mvuh hpa-Mi hpa*, many contents overlap. In my field sites, few people know the name *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* but they refer to *chaw maw hkaw* (the tales of old people) or *Guli* (old proprieties, the loan words of Chinese 古礼) to indicate *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. It should be controversial to put *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* into the category of *Ka law hkaw* or *Chaw maw hkaw*. I only imply a certain similarity between the two.

Mvuh hpa-Mi hpa is an extremely long story. Some scholars divide it into several parts.

Part 1: The Creation of Sky and Earth

Part 2: The Creation of All Things

Part 3: How People Have Lived Down the Generations

I will briefly show the beginning of the story *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*.

At that time, there was no sky and no earth, no wind and no rain, no sun, no moon, and no stars.

The world was enveloped in fog and the day and the night could not be distinguished. The cosmos was like a spider's nest. *G'uisha* sat in front of the nest and became engrossed in meditation, then he created the sky and the earth. *G'uisha* rubbed his hand and foot and made four big fish from his sweat. He made four big pillars from gold, silver, copper and iron He made the frame of the sky and earth. Although the sky and the earth was made, it was dark and nothing could be seen. *G'uisha* made the sun from his left eye and made the moon from his right eye Because no human was in the world, *G'uisha* planted a gourd to raise the seed of a human But the gourd raised by *G'uisha* with tender care was cut off from the vine by a foolish cow by accident and the gourd rolled down a hill. *G'uisha* went around to search for the gourd . . . and in the end a bee told him, "The gourd has rolled into the sea." So *G'uisha* let a crab pick the gourd up and let a mouse gnaw into the gourd, and finally the first two humans, *Cahti* and *Nahti*, came out.

When *Cahti* and *Nahti* grew up, *G'uisha* wanted them to marry. But the two did not want to because they grew up like sister and brother. *G'uisha* showed them a millstone or sieve to explain to them how to marry, and finally, *G'uisha* succeeded in using the love philter. [Lei and Liu 1999]

After the marriage of the first humans *Cahti* and *Nahti*, the story continues on to explain how the people were divided into ethnic groups, how the Lahu people fought with the enemy, and so on. In the stories, all the characters such as subordinates of *G'uisha* and the first humans are described as a pair of male and female. When *G'uisha* wanted humans, (s)he planted a gourd and the first couple was born from

the gourd. These features are objectified and used as cultural resources by the local government.

Although these three types of singing share similar characters such as repeated short simple melodies and less action in the performance, they are quite different. The *K'a mui hkaw* is purely for fun and its improvisation and good wording is the key of this singing. On the contrary, the *Maw hkaw* is a sacred song for the ritual. Many *Mawpas* did not want to tell me all the meanings of the song because they can sing the *Maw hkaw* only with offerings to *G'uisha* in the rituals. In *Maw hkaw*, the proper form and proper sequence of wording is most important, and improvisation is not needed at all. The last type, old folklores such as *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*, need proper form and proper sequence, the same as *Maw hkaw*, but it is not sacred at all and elders sing it for fun like *K'a mui hkaw*. In this sense, it might be said as being between *K'a mui hkaw* and *Maw hkaw*. According to Anthony Walker, who translated the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* into English in the 1990s from the Chinese version, which was collected by folkloristic researcher Liu Huihao in the 1960s, "there are many different versions of the epic, as one must expect of such oral literature as this. Some versions are much longer than this, as the bard sets out to entertain his listeners the whole night through; others are shorter" [Walker ed. 1995: 16].

3. Development and Registration of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* as Cultural Heritage

Currently, we can find four or more books about *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* published both in Lahu and Chinese. Although the registration of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* as national cultural heritage was in 2006, the collecting work of oral literature had already started in the 1950s. At that time, scholars had actively collected and organized the versions, and wrote them down as texts.

3.1 The transition of the usage of oral literature

Before discussing the situation of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* itself, I will show the situation of ethnic oral literatures in China throughout time. The collection of oral literatures of ethnic minorities began in the 1930s. Under the conflicts and warfare between Kuomintang and the Communist Party, Beijing University, Qinghua University and Nankai University evacuated to Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, and jointly established the National Southwestern Associated University. Many distinguished scholars had collected at Yunnan and they did outstanding research about ethnic groups in Southwest China. The famous scholar Wen Yi-duo collected the oral literatures among ethnic minorities in Southwest China and did

comparative studies to reveal the relations among the myths of ethnic people and that of ancient China.⁵ The other famous linguist Ma Xue-liang also collected oral literatures of ethnic groups and claimed the importance of oral literatures to reveal their ancient religious knowledge considering the lack of written texts. [Ma 1994 (1941)].

The emphasis of the importance of ethnic traditions continued after the establishment of the PRC. In 1955, the journal *Folk Literature* (minjian wenxue) was launched and many oral literatures of ethnic minorities were published. Many scholars and students actively collected the oral literatures as part of a movement that aimed to decrease illiteracy, at the same time intending to show good treatment toward ethnic groups by the Communist Party. The attitude toward oral literatures changed drastically from the beginning of the Great Leap. The oral literatures were seen as useful tools to propagate the principals of communism, and scholars emphasized the “new” songs to celebrate the greatness of the Communist Party. In 1958, Mao had recommended to scholars to collect new laborer’s songs rather than old oral literatures. The “Folk Literature” changed its emphasis from ethnic oral literatures to new labor songs. Some traditional oral literatures were still published, but they were rewritten to place emphasis on the stories which suit the idea of communism. Such criticism toward the “oldness” of oral traditions greatly increased during the Cultural Revolution, when all old things were denied as feudal remnants, and the collection of oral tradition almost stopped. The revival of the research had to wait until the 1980s.

After 1978, scholars started to discuss the idea that the culture lost during the Cultural Revolution should be recovered. In 1983, the national publishing project of the so-called “Three Compilations of Folk Literature” started. This project was basically conducted by the provinces, but Yunnan had many kinds of ethnic groups, so the Yunnan government decided to publish this compilation based on ethnicity.

At that time, local ethnic elites started to make appeals regarding their ethnic culture. Many ethnic festivals, music and costumes were recovered and ethnic elites themselves actively entered into discussions about their own culture. Amid such attention for folklore literatures, new academic movements occurred in the study of ethnic folklores concerning the study of ethnic histories by using the folktales. In the preface of the first issue of the journal *The Study of Ethnic Literature*, Ma Xue-Liang wrote that “some comrades have been emphasizing the literature only in its role as education” and pointed out that the ethnic literatures have the possibility to be important material for studying ethnic culture in anthropology [Ma 1989: 18-19].

⁵ He claimed the creation myth among Miao is related to the roots of ancient Chinese mythological deities named Fuxi and Nv wa who are in three Sovereigns and Five Emperors [Wen 1989].

At this stage, folktales were seen as “scientific” evidence of history. Along with the progress of the study, ethnic oral folktales were divided into several categories such as historical myths, folk legends, folk songs and epic poetry, and each are well collected and written down as texts.

The Lahu case

This transition from the tool to propagate communism to the material for studying ethnic culture also relates to the case of the Lahu. The main actor of these activities is the government of Lancang Lahu Autonomous County. This county was built in 1959 and it is the only autonomous county of Lahu in the world. The same as other ethnic groups, the revival of the culture was based on the attitude that culture should form the “scientific” and “materialistic” face, and the relationship between oral literatures and history came to receive attention. Since the beginning of the study of the Lahu in the early times of the PRC, the difficulty to reveal the old history of the Lahu due to its lack of written texts had been pointed out.⁶ A new way of historical study by using oral literatures had started among the Miao, and the Lahu local officials and scholars followed the trend. In 1991, Lancang County government started a project to write the Lahu history based on oral literatures. A paper written by Zhang Ronglan, a Chinese scholar, showed the active role of academia in supporting this project. She pointed out that the oral stories of the Lahu contain many historical place names and persons’ names, so they can be used as scientific historical sources [Zhang 1994]. The local researchers and governmental officials collected the place names in the myths and tried to find the real places on the map. After over ten years of research, the book *The Lahu History* was published in 2003 as a memorial for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Lancang County. In this book, the story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is used in the “pre-history” parts because it shows the history of the beginning of human beings.⁷

Other than the writing history project, Lancang County continuously uses *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* to develop the county. After the start of the writing history project, in 1992 a new Lahu original festival named the Gourd Festival was established. This is based on the story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* that the first people were born from a gourd. Contrary to the way other ethnic groups “revive” their traditional festivals, the

⁶ In the early 20th century, a missionary of the American Baptist Church arrived in the Lahu area and many Lahu were converted to Christianity. At that time, missionaries created the Lahu writing system by using the alphabet. In China, local scholars revised the writing system (they changed some spelling by selecting different consonants and vowels and added the tone sign at the end of the word to erase the tone mark of the missionary version), and named it as New Lahu writing. This writing is very new to them, so it is impossible to find the ancient history of the Lahu from such writings.

⁷ Ma Jianxiong also discusses the process of writing Lahu history [Ma 2008].

Gourd Festival is a completely new festival. Originally, the seasonal events among Lahu are *hk'aw ca ve* (eating the year), which is held during the Chinese New Year, and Qingming in the second month of the lunar calendar, which is cleaning the graves. But both are seen as derived from Chinese traditions and local elites might think these are not worth representing as the Lahu's original culture.

In 2003, Lancang County officially started the "County Development Project through Lahu Culture" with the assumption of office of the new chief of the county. Under the project, the importance of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* had accelerated. The symbolic change was changing the catch phrase of the Lahu ethnicity. Before the project, the catch phrase of the Lahu was "The Tiger Hunters" because the Lahu are said to be good hunters and sometimes even hunted tigers before the beginning of the PRC, and some folktales told that the meaning of the word "Lahu" is frying (hu) the tiger (La).⁸ But this catch phrase was replaced by "The People Born from the Gourd" after this project. However, several difficulties and tensions among several actors arose.

The new chief of the county actively promoted the development. He said in the speech of the Gourd Festival held in Kunming in 2009 that "The Lahu is the only ethnic group who use the motif of the gourd as representative of their ethnicity. The gourd is the basis of the life and flourishing of the Lahu, the totem to which the Lahu kowtowed across the generations, and the symbol of beautiful family and peaceful life." [Shi 2010: 180]. However, contrary to the points he stressed, the gourd is not the original motif of the Lahu but also of other ethnic groups such as the Lisu, Miao, Hani and Yao, who also have similar creation myths. Therefore, he had to stress the originality of Lahu as the only the ethnic group who uses the gourd "as representative of ethnicity" in his speech.

To relieve the contradiction of the originality of the Lahu culture, he gives an interesting definition of Lahu culture. At the conference held in 2005, he said that "Lahu culture" is not limited to the Lahu ethnicity but also includes the culture of 20 or more ethnic groups who live in Lancang County. It seems curious that "Lahu culture" contains the culture of other ethnic groups, but in saying so, he intended to keep good ties among the people of Lancang County. Therefore, several ethnic groups perform on stage in the Gourd Festival, although their numbers are far smaller than that of the Lahu.

The other difficulty about the development of the use of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is found between the culture and the religion. As I mentioned above, the story of *Mvuh Ha-Mi Hpa* contains religious elements

⁸ This view is doubtful because the "hu" rarely means frying. Famous linguist James Matisoff also denies this view (personal communication).

that the main actor, *G'uisha*, is the supreme god of the Lahu. The belief in *G'uisha* includes animism, Buddhism, Christian and even Charisma movements, so the promotion of *G'uisha* has the danger of being seen as a religious matter or even belonging to superstition. But the chief of the county artfully avoided the religious elements and advocated the “*G'uisha* culture.” He wrote that “the *G'uisha* culture created the gourd culture, the *G'ui sha* culture created the dance in the festival, the *G'uisha* culture developed the harmony and development of the Lahu culture, *G'uisha* culture made the village and family culture such as the social and cultural morals between seniors and juniors. [Shi 2009: 101]. This comment recognized the importance of *G'uisha* in the Lahu culture, but he carefully avoided the term “religion” and instead used “culture” to describe *G'uisha*. It is also the case with the Gourd Festival, as it is sited as “the only modern festival among the festivals of the Lahu that perfectly contains no color of religion and superstition” [CPPCC Lancang Lahu Autonomous Prefectural Committee 2003: 389].

This movement was accelerated when *Mvuh hpa-Mi Hpa* was registered as National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006. It belongs to the first group registered as National Intangible Heritage in China. The reason for the registration is that “The Lahu narrative poem, ‘Mupa Mipa’ . . . is indispensable and valuable material for the study of the Lahu people’s history and culture. It is . . . valuable to maintain the spiritual life and the ties of the Lahu ethnicity. However, due to the impact of modernism, this myth is on the verge of being lost, facing a lack of people who follow it. At present, one to two people remain in the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County that can complete the singing. Therefore, ‘Mupa Mipa’ requires urgent protection”.⁹ This registration was done not by Lancang county but by Simao city¹⁰, which is a higher administrative level than Lancang. However, the other counties in Simao city were not part of the Lahu autonomous county, so Lancang was the most active institution to celebrate the registration and used it as a cultural resource to develop the county.

3.2 The way of developing: embodying the myth

After the registration of Cultural Heritage, the officials and scholars discussed how to use *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* to develop the county. *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is originally an extremely long epic story and the singing performance is not active, so it is not suitable for performance. The developer Mr. Lu, who had the

⁹ “004 Mupa Mipa”, National List, In *the Intangible Cultural Heritage in China 2006* <<http://www.ihchina.cn/5/10621.html>> [accessed 19 January 2019]

¹⁰ Simao city existed from 2003 to 2007. Since 2007 it has become Pu'er city.

experience of renovating a city in Yunnan to embody the ethnic people's traditional idea of the calendar, was hired, and they decided to resourcanize *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* by embodying the contents of the story. He focused on the motif of the gourd and decided to embody the gourd as a large monument in the central city of Lancang "so as to let everyone be able to see the gourd from anywhere in Lancang" (quoted from personal communication). Not only the big gourd monument, but he also started to build the Gourd Park in the central part of the county capital. The project was started in August of 2008, and the park was designed in the shape of a gourd and the big gourd monument was set in the center of the park (not as big as his original plan which was a huge gold gourd at the top of the mountain, not in the park). Several shops were planned to be built surrounding the monument. But enticing the people was not such a smooth process, maybe because the location of the gourd park is in the downtown area of Lancang City and a little bit far from the center of the city.

In the development, Mr. Lu was involved in the difficult project of embodying the supreme god *G'ui sha*. In the beginning, he created the bust of a male in the M village in Nanling 南嶺 where the home of the chief of the county was located. But when I had the opportunity to arrive at his office in Kunming, he asked me what I thought about the shape of the *G'uisha*. He told me that his team will build a new *G'uisha* statue in the central city of Lancang and they planned to shape it as a boy and a girl. According to him, this is because many supernatural creators in the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* are couples and *G'uisha* could also be a couple. As I mentioned above, in the long epic language the words are lengthened in a four-syllable style. *G'uisha* is also sometimes divided into *G'uiya* and *Shaya*. But this doesn't necessarily mean *G'uisha* is a couple called *G'uiya* and *Shaya*, because the term *ya* just indicates male or the son. His idea might be derived from an ethnography written by Shanshan Du which argues the duality and egalitarian idea of the Lahu. She also discussed the dual feature of *G'uisha* [Du 2003].

This discussion about the shape of *G'uisha* also arose in the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* 3D animation project which was planned beginning in 2011. It was organized by the TV producer who brought in the Lahu famous singer group "Dabao Brothers." He aimed to use the modern media to promote the Lahu culture. This animation contains seven parts and 30 episodes. In a meeting regarding this animation in 2012, the shape of the *G'uisha* was discussed and some scholar pointed out that *G'uisha* should be a pair/couple (based on the personal communication with Prof. Nishimoto who joined the conference). But in the end *G'uisha* was shaped as a big man in the completed video.

Establishment of heritage bases

Other than the symbols of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*, the places in the myth were also the target of embodiment. M village in Nanling 南嶺 was selected as the development point. The chief promotes Nanling as the cultural center of Lancang County. He stresses that Nanling is located at the center of the whole Lancang County and its natural environment is quite similar with the worldview of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. Therefore, he said he would develop the Nanling district as embodying the story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* and called Nanling “*Yeh hkaw Lahu* (the wild mountain of Lahu).” Under such claims, many places in Nanling are named along with the story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* such as “the place where *G’uisha* created the sky and the earth,” “the place *G’uisha* had danced and sang,” “the pond where *G’uisha* planted the gourd,” “the place where *Ca ti* and *Na ti¹¹* grew up” etc. This project was also intended for green tourism, and many wild mushrooms, vegetables, honeys, pork meats and wild tea have been promoted.

Not only Nanling, but also several other regions are the target of development. Originally, Lancang is one of the most periphery places in China and almost no tourists go there. When a few tourists arrive in Lancang, they see only the central city and do not visit other sites around the county. The chief of the county aims to connect several regions to establish a tour route around all of Lancang. In addition to several historical spots, he built the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* Heritage Base. Currently, Nanling, Lao-Dabao 老達保 village in Jiujiang 酒井 region, Banli 班利 in Donghui 東回, Mengnuo 勐糯 in Muga 木戛, Kalang 佻朗 in Fubang 富邦, Nanduan 南段 in Nuofu 糯福, Huimin 惠民 region etc. are selected. Although all are heritage bases, these are quite different from each other. For example, Lao Dabao and Banli are in the Christian region. Especially as Banli is the center of Chinese Christian Lahu, several pastors from Myanmar and Thailand often arrive. In advance of the county’s development project based on *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*, these places had already started development through ethnic singers. A singer group named “The Tiger Hunters 獵虎組合” made their debut from Banli. Their harmonious singing style is a Christian one, and its pop music style is welcomed among the Lahu people. Following them, “The Dabao Brothers 達保兄弟” from Lao Dabao made their debut. Two of the four members are real brothers and their family was famous for their great gifts of singing. The harmonies which stem from hymn had attracted a TV director and the family was selected to appear on a show on CCTV. In a show named “Music Family,” they went to the top and

¹¹ The first couple born from the gourd.

won an upright piano. This piano is placed in the family's traditional high-floor wooden house. This success caught the attention of the government, and Lancang's government took note of the villagers' ability in singing and gave the Lao-Dabao village more than 100 guitars after their victory. These two villages were well developed because of the music. Almost all the roads in the villages were covered by cement, and even stages were set up in the villages. Currently, Nanling, Banli and Lao-Dabao are the outstanding sightseeing points outside the capital city.



The travel route map of Lancang drawn by the tourist bureau of Lancang county [Lancang xian Lvyouju eds 2008]

Lancang government made the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* Heritage Bases to connect various regions into one line. Although the criteria of selection are not very clear, these bases are increasing. It includes some

villages that were once committed to a charismatic cult and related to the revolt against the government in the past. These areas retain old oral literatures because Chinese culture had less influence on them. These villages are “traditional” and some elders can still sing *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. But there were no special developments at least by the end of my field research in 2014. The reason is discussed in the next chapter.

Until now, the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* has been an indispensable resource for the Lancang government to develop the county. The process of resourcanizing the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* can be described as the interaction between the local policy-makers and academism. In the beginning, scholars had evaluated the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* as important material to reveal the old history of the Lahu. After that, the new chief of the county started to use it for development. He set the development policy based on “the Lahu culture,” and the developer Mr. Lu was hired to embody the worldview of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* into the real world. Through such interactions, the chief of the county and the development company carefully removed the religious elements and the representative “Lahu culture” was created.

4. Contradictions and Difficulties

4.1 The Difficulty of the Regional Collaboration

Despite the efforts of local governments, currently the Lahu ethnic culture seems to not be well recognized outside Yunnan and the tourist industry seems to be not well developed.

The chief and officials of the county planned to put Lancang into tourist routes in Yunnan. Yunnan is one of the most flourished areas by tourism, and every county has something worth seeing. The most famous and well-established areas are Dali, Lijiang and Xishuanbanna. Dali and Lijiang are located in northern and northwestern Yunnan and famous for old cities built by Bai and Naxi people. The old city of Lijiang was registered as World Heritage by UNESCO in 1997. Xishuanbanna is located in southern Yunnan and famous for its tropical climate, Theravada Buddhism and the exotic culture of the Dai people. Lancang, located in southwestern Yunnan, is in the middle of these two big spots, so the local elites aimed to place Lancang as the hub of these spots and create a big circular route of tourism in Yunnan.

However, this route was not easily established. One reason is the geographical condition of Yunnan in which several high mountains and rivers run north and south, while almost all transportation connecting the provinces and capital runs radially from Kunming. There are other new tourism spots that have received attention, such as the border city Dehong, where the border of Myanmar and China is located, and Cangyuan,

which became famous for the Mud Festival among the Wa people, but tourists usually move straight from Kunming and do not go through Lancang.

Currently, the Gourd Festival seems to receive less attention from outside. The advertisement is not effective at all and only people who have some relationship with Lancang people can know the date. The main joiners from outside are company owners and officers of the central or provincial governments. The Gourd Festival becomes an opportunity for local elites to show the development conditions of Lancang and beg for budgets or encourage the investment of new companies.

Of course, the development of the ethnic culture is not necessarily confined to tourism. It might play an important role to unite the ethnic people. However, there also exists sensitive difficulties in the Lancang case. Regardless of the aims of the creators, the interpretations of the created object are open to everyone. After the establishment of the Lahu culture, misunderstandings and complaints by the local people arose.

4.2 The Discordance with the Locals

During my fieldwork, many villagers said that “I heard the Lahu were born from the gourd. If you want to know more details, you should go to find elders or books.” When I visited the elders who are known as being “good at old stories,” they said proudly that “my story is a 98% match with the written text.” From these narratives, we can see the authorization of the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* and the sense of authenticity of the written text is very strong. Even if they do not know what cultural heritage is, it affects their way of thinking.

However, there are also misunderstandings which do not fit with this culture of “the culture as resource.” The contradictions and misunderstandings do not usually appear in everyday life, but they come to light in a specific situation.

The misunderstanding between the Lahu in China and in Thailand

The Gourd Festival held in 2010 was an opportunity for me to see the different interpretations toward the Lahu culture. The festival was bigger than the usual years because it was the first opportunity for government to show the “*Yeh hkaw Lahu* (the wild mountain of Lahu)” in Nanling to the guests, the tour to Nanling and Lao-Dabao after the performance that was planned. In this time of the festival, a scholar in Yunnan University of Nationality (it is renamed as Yunnan Minzu University now) invited over thirty

Lahus from Thailand to the Gourd Festival. These guests from abroad were the “candle lighters.”¹² With many guests, they joined the tour to the *Yeh hk'aw Lahu*, which contains many monuments to embody the story of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*.

When the guides explained that one monument is the bust of *G'uisha*, the guests from Thailand suddenly started to go down on their knees and lighted incense for it. They continued praying to every monument lighting incense every time, and the tour frequently had to stop. The chief and other government officials seemed to be uncomfortable while they had to wait. According to the opinion of the chief, the Gourd Festival is “the only modern festival among the festival of Lahu that perfectly has no color of religion and superstition,” and the government always carefully avoided the religious atmosphere. But this logic has nothing to do with the Lahu from abroad, the everything about *G'uisha* is an object to pray to for them. This tour was intended to show the new tourism site for company owners and scholars related to Lancang, so these attitudes of Lahu from Thailand were not welcomed by government officers. From the following year, they were not invited.

The dissatisfaction of the people in the heritage base

This kind of tension between “culture” and “religion” also exists in the heritage base of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. As I mentioned above, the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* heritage base contains various religious areas such as the village of Christians and that of the Fu cult. Fofang 佛房 is the temple of Fu, Buddha, which is called *G'uisha*. The religious charisma movement of Fu was the response to the unstable political situations on the China-Myanmar border during the Qing dynasty and there were at least five strong Fofangs in the early 19th century. These Five Buddha 五佛 were suppressed by the Qing government, but such worshipping of Fofangs has continued meagerly, and it has gradually recovered after the end of the Cultural Revolution.¹³

Although the local government carefully watches such religious centers so as not to allow the revival of the anti-government movement, at the same time these Fofangs are part of the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* heritage base. According to Nishimoto, since the 1980s, some Fofang have been rebuilt using subsidies from the county government [Nishimoto 2013: 10-11]. Currently, several Fofang hold a dancing festival on

¹² In the Lahu religion, animists, Buddhists, and the worshippers of some charisma are hard to recognize from the outside. Because they often told us only that they are the “candle lighters (*peh tu pa*),” I couldn't know the religion of the VIPs from Thailand at that time. For more details about the candle lighters of Lahu, see [Nishimoto 2008].

¹³ About the current situation of Fofangs, see [Nishimoto 2013].

different days and many Lahus from other areas gather.

However, behind such revival, some villagers complain about the way of revitalizing the Fofang. When I visited D Fu, one of the strongest Fofang in the late 19th century, one villager told me that the government is only happy about *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* and does not care about the Fofang itself. He said this Fofang had always been crowded with many worshippers in the Kuomintang era, and the big bronze cup for lighting incense sticks had always been filled to the point of overflowing. But during the Cultural Revolution, worshipping was banned and the bronze cup and a gold statue of Guanyin was taken by the government. After the end of Cultural Revolution, the government reconstructed the temple in 1991 and it was registered as a Conserved Cultural Relic by the county government. Officers also bought a small Guanyin made of plastic for them but didn't give back the original bronze cup and gold Guanyin. They said to the villagers that they will give a better Guanyin if the villagers take care of the Fofang well, but the promises have not been fulfilled yet. One middle aged guy said, "In the beginning, the government officer said that they will make a new cup for us. But the small Guanyin and small cup was stolen again and police couldn't find them. After that, officers might have become afraid of the revival of the worshipping, and they quit the plan." He also said that many villagers are also not very active to revive the religion, because they are currently very busy since the introduction of cash crops such as sugar cane and tea and do not have much time to spend on the activities of Fu.

The government officers are very sensitive about the way of revival; they only permit the revival of their "culture," but the "religion" is not welcomed. For example, at another Fofang named S Fu, the festival is held both on the 9th day of the Chinese New Year and on the 15th of August in the Lunar calendar¹⁴ and many people gather around the Fofang for dancing accompanied by gourd pipes all night. Government officers and TV cameras also arrive at S Fu and broadcast the flourishing of the culture. When I joined the dancing in 2011, several food shops had lined up on the road and many youths arrived there to dance all night. But after the end of my fieldwork, one of my friends told me that the activities of S Fu became tense. According to him, one day a Lahu man came to S Fu and suddenly shouted that "if this pond behind the Fofang fills with water, the Han people will cease to exist!" After that, lots of policemen and government officers repeatedly arrived there and watched them stricter than before, so they refrained from gathering.

¹⁴ The 15th August is the important holiday for the S Fu. This is the same day as Zhongqiu or Mid-Autumn festival among Chinese. But the Lahu do not eat moon cake or make Zong zi (Chinese traditional food which made of glutinous rice stuffed with different fillings and wrapped in bamboo reed, or other large flat leaves), but everyone go to Fofang for dancing in the night. According to villagers, they can enjoy the sexual relationship with any person, regardless of their marital status, only during the night.

Currently, the temple in D Fu, which had a stronger influence than S Fu in the past, is not a sacred place for worship.¹⁵

Curiously, such tension between religion and culture seems not to be the case for the Christians. The Christians seem to adapt to the movement of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* cultural resources. It might be because of the ambiguous but magisterial division between religion and superstition in China's context. In China, the religious activity is allowed only in a registered religious activity place (宗教活動場所). Christian churches in Lancang are registered as religious activity places, and the activity in the Church is officially guaranteed. But Fofangs are only registered as "Conserved Cultural Relics" but not registered as religious activity places. Their activities are not recognized as religion officially and they are accepted only as the Lahu traditional culture. Currently, the activities surrounding Fu are few, and mainly they are limited to the dancing festival, so the government basically leaves them a free hand. But if their worship becomes active, it should be limited.

Of course, many people who live around Fofangs not only criticize the revival but actively practice cultural performances such as dancing in the festivals. This is because they know it is good for their local development. Based on the governmental policy, the village where there is traditional culture can easily get the support from the government. Not only the villages containing Fofang, but also the other villages pay attention to such politics over the Lahu culture. For example, in my main field site 10km away from their nearest Fofang, since 2013 the village head and the representative of women (婦女主任) started to join the dance at Fofang in the Chinese New Year bringing gifts for government officers. This is, according to the representative of women, in order to "make them care about us." After that, in 2014 the road in the village was paved with cement, and in 2016 the construction project to rebuild all the houses in the village as concrete wall houses started. In this sense, the heritage base in Fofang becomes the arena to show their cultural resources to the government officials.

It might be curious that such movements are under the name of the protection of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*. The selection of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* heritage base does not directly lead to the protection or inheritance of the singing of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* itself, but rather are recognized as the base for bringing local development through appealing traditional culture, except religion.

¹⁵ Nishimoto also reported that D Fu was reconstructed in 1991 and was registered as Conserved Cultural Relic by the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County government. However, the reconstructed temple is not a sacred place for worship today [Nishimoto 2013: 9].

5. Conclusion

Today, *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is indispensable for the development of Lancang Lahu Autonomous County. In current China, every ethnic minority needs their original culture. So, the ethnic elites and local governments actively use culture to strengthen their identity and development.

In the process of making cultural resources, we need to pay attention to the question of who. Who takes initiative and makes whose culture for whom? I set three main actors: policy makers, representation, and local people. In the Lahu case, the policy makers and the representation are closely related in that the government officers make the policy and the scholars gave them “scientific” support. They jointly take initiative to make the representative and authentic “Lahu Culture”. Since the government hired the developer Mr. Lu, he read many papers written by scholars and asked them the shape of *G’uisha*. When the government held the conference on making the DVD of *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa*, many scholars were invited and needed to show their opinion about the shape of *G’uisha*. Local scholars also welcomed the trends and actively gave a boost to the representation.

In contrast to the closeness of the two, such activities do not care much about the local people. Despite how the government stresses the indigenoussness of the Lahu culture they perform, the local practice is separated from that. The resourcanizing of culture does not go on to incorporate the complexities of the local culture, but rather to create a hassle-free, wholesome culture.

When they sought the way to use myth as a cultural resource to develop the county, the embodiment of the myth was the solution they selected. The gourd monument, the bust of *G’uisha*, and the tourism park *Yeh h’kaw Lahu* are the representatives of the embodied *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* world. In the process of embodiment, local scholars and officers carefully reduce the religious elements. *G’uisha* is the creator of the world, but the monument of *G’uisha* should not be the target of worshipping. Also, the Gourd Festival should be a modern festival that perfectly has no color of religion and superstition.

Currently, many religious monuments are registered as cultural heritage in China. Not only big religions such as Buddhism or Islam, but also local belief is the target of conservation. But in the Lahu case, the *G’uisha* contains elements that are complex, such as Buddhism, Christianity and the cult. Especially, the conservation of the *G’uisha* contains the risk of reviving the antigovernment cult. Therefore, it might be the only way for the government officials to de-religiousize it.

The process of resourcanizing the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* since the 1980s has been the continuation of difficulty. For the chief of the county, *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* is an important tool to create the tourism

industry. He tried to draw the sightseeing route both inside and outside Lancang, but it faced difficulty. Inside Lancang, as I showed above, *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* heritage contains several complex religions and faces difficulty to reach an agreement. Outside of Lancang, several famous sightseeing spots such as Lijiang and Xishuanbanna have already established a tourism route, so regional cooperation is not easy. Other than the tourism industry, the Lahu culture is expected to bring unity to the Lahu ethnicity. It seems to have succeeded when we saw many people gathering at the Gourd Festival. But at the same time, it is prevented because of the tensions with religious people. The Lahu from Thailand worshiped the monument of *G'uisha* because they didn't share the same manner applied to a cultural resource in China. The people in the heritage base want to save their religion rather than the myth. The peculiar manner of a cultural resource in Lancang County has several restrictions, and the form of Lahu culture itself became far different from its original orality. It is not much attached by local people.

In the end, what kind of resource did the *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* and the "Lahu Culture" become? Currently, it becomes the resource to invite the budget allocations from outside. The Gourd Festival created the opportunity to invite higher government officials and company owners to show the situation of Lancang, where the place has beautiful and wholesome culture but is not much developed. In a same manner, the Fofangs or local villages use the same strategy to get closer to the budget of the local government. If they actively make appeals for their original culture such as with dance, song, or clothing, the environment of the region could improve. Despite the richness of the oral literatures among the Lahu, the local officers are sensitive to suit it to the principle of culture and not religion, and in the end, it becomes separate from the local practice. This is the contradiction of the phenomenon of cultural heritage, especially among ethnic minorities in China today.

In the shadow of the created Lahu Culture, a new wave of oral literature arises in the grass-roots base. Nowadays, *K'a mui hkaw*, the traditional antiphonal singing, is vitalized among the local Lahu in Lancang. Along with the spread of VCD and mobile phones, local people can record, repeat and carry the sound of *K'a mui hkaw*. Originally, the singing of *K'a mui hkaw* was limited to the people who live near one another, but now they can compare the *K'a mui hkaw* of various regions. They know well about which regions have good singers and where the differences in the melody and wording are. The flourishing of *K'a mui hkaw* is based on electronic techniques and middle-aged people enjoy it. Ironically, this flourishing becomes possible because it is not objectified as a cultural resource by the county.

It is needless to say that the form of culture always has the possibility to change along with the

processes associated with a cultural resource. Many other cases of cultural heritage in China are often in the same situation. When local governments or elites pay attention to some culture and start the reservation, the culture is inevitably standardized and often leaves from the hand of local people. This is because of the pressure to have their own culture that every ethnic minority face. This pressure is directly connected with the development of the region, especially in the autonomous regions of ethnic minorities. *Mvuh Hpa-Mi Hpa* will be continuously promoted as the representative of the Lahu culture. Grass-rooted cultural development is gradually occurring in China.

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