CONTESTING BATIK: CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, COMERCIALIZATION, 
AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN DANZHAI, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

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Drawing on three theoretical frameworks, anthropological theory of art, development theory, and tourism theory, this paper examines how Danzhai batik has changed from traditional to modern and analyzes the phenomena of “Cultural Development,” commercialization, and social change in Danzhai, China. Since the Chinese government implemented the “reform and opening” policy of the 1980s, the state has employed a “Cultural Development” policy and advocated for tourism to develop the economy, both of which have exploited local cultures. Such policies and commercialized activities have caused the meanings and functions of the batik craft to change, resulting in traditional cultural loss. The Miao people are a minority ethnic group in Danzhai. Although Danzhai Miao people encounter various development issues, traditional culture is being revived and being reinvented. This paper argues that the new social functions, cultural meanings, and representations of Danzhai batik resulting from these changes have allowed batik to continue sustaining and preserving Miao culture.

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Danzhai batik, produced by the Miao minority in Danzhai, is among the finest traditional textiles in China. The Miao people “have used their textiles as a kind of record of identity and history” (Lingley, 2009, p. 113), and express their unique worldviews and culture representations through batik pattern. In Danzhai, for instance, women draw batik patterns that include birds, fish, butterflies, flowers, and pomegranates. Birds, a totem to the Miao, indicate that the Miao peoples’ ancestor originated from “The Birds Tribe”. Fish represent
fertility much like fish laying eggs. Some patterns have birds with fish in their beaks, which means that birds (which represent the male) copulate with fish (which represent the female). The Miao people think the butterfly is their primitive mother Goddess. In their creation story, the butterfly fell in love with a water bubble, and then humans were born. Flowers represent girls or women, also meaning love. The pomegranate symbolizes fertility and plenty of offspring.

Today batik craft has become a significant handcraft art in China. Local governments and elites are eager to develop the batik art industry, not only for the preservation of traditional culture and maintenance of ethnic identity, but more importantly, as economic development. Since the 1980s, China has promoted ethnic minority cultural arts in a marketization trend. This included using ethnic minority culture to attract business investments, and as a potential unique resource for economic purposes. This phenomenon frequently is described by scholars as “using ethnic culture to set up a stage or a bridge, and running economic purpose on the show” (Peng 彭, 2009). The government also established policies such as “Cultural Development” for ethnic minority groups, and facilitated their development of a cultural industry with a commercial purpose. Having been involved in market-economy, regional competition and improved livelihoods, the Miao people are experiencing an unprecedented culture shock and social change. Consequently, Danzhai batik is undergoing a cultural transformation, which has resulted in batik becoming a fundamental feature of the Miao culture’s representation and state-level
cultural heritage. Batik is now regarded as a potential economic resource to be exploited by the government.

![Figure 2: Danzhai typical Batik. Photo collected from (Museum 贵州省群众艺术馆, 1960, p. 1)](image)

Based on informal interviews and observations in Danzhai, this paper aims to understand the implications of China’s “Cultural Development” for the Miao ethnic group and the strategies Danzhai people have adopted to solve and balance these paradoxes in the face of modernization and globalization. Furthermore, this paper will examine feasible measures that could be implemented to protect the traditional batik art of the Miao people and the sustainment of cultural continuity in Danzhai.
II. Background and Context

Batik has rich historical records in China. “Wax printing existed in China as early as the late Qin Dynasty (BC 221-207) or early Han Dynasty (BC 206 – CD 220). Though widespread knowledge of the existence of Chinese batik as a finished product first occurred during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), then batik became yet another ‘Silk Road’ commodity that was exported to Europe and elsewhere” (Anonymous, 2013). According to the ancient period records of the Qin and Han dynasties, the ancestors of the Miao living in Jingchu areas (Southern China) frequently used the batik technique. The ancient archives of *The Post Han Dynasty Book and Nan Ethnic Biography* 后汉书·南蛮传, *The Notes of Collecting Gods* 搜神记 documented that in the Han period there were “The Five Brooks ethnic groups 五溪蛮” and “The Panhu ethnic group 盘弧蛮,” which were the original ancestors of the current Miao People. They “weaved tree bark, dyed grass juice and colored clothes” (Yang 杨 & Yang 杨, 2005, p. 29). This is historical evidence that in the Han Dynasty, Chinese had a mature batik technique. Even today in the Southeast Guizhou region there are many stories and folk tales about honey being painted on the fabric and a dyed grass solution on the textile to make batik as in the ancient past. A historical book, *The Record of Illustration and Traditional Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志 written by Guo Ruo-xu 郭若虚 during the Song dynasty about the history of traditional Chinese painting, records an event during which an ethnic group leader in Guizhou was summoned by the emperor Tang Taizong 唐太宗 during the Tang Dynasty (lu 卢 & li 立, 1988, p. 76). This
leader’s cloth was regarded as very exotic and special as there were various bird patterns and colorful techniques in the batik (Lu & Li, 1988, p. 76).

The Miao people in Danzhai called themselves “Ganao,” which means “the tribe of birds.” There is a lot of archaeological evidence that the Miao people’s batik patterns are related to the Liangzhu Culture (BC 5200-4100) (Yang, 2007). Liangzhu Culture, which is characterized as “the dawn of oriental civilization” (An, 1997; Zhang, 1995), is one of the most significant cultures from the late Neolithic Age. Archaeological research and excavation indicate that Liangzhu culture had a lot of bird patterns and carved symbols in their exquisite jade ware, pottery, and lacquer ware (Shi, 2007; Yang, 2007), which are similar to modern Danzhai batik patterns. It also indicates that the Miao people were the majority ethnic group in ancient China. Ironically, nowadays, because of social and economic marginalization, the Miao people have changed from “The Majority” to “The Minority” status in China.
The Miao people have a long and sad history. Approximately, 4600 years ago, the Miao people lost a battle against the Han people (who have now become “the majority” in China). As a result, the Miao people had to continuously migrate from the Liangzhu area to southern China, Laos, and the United States (Shi, 2007; Yang, 2007). These histories and stories can be found in the batik patterns of Danzhai today. For instance, there is a special motif pattern that is very popular and includes 12 “spin” patterns together in one piece of batik. Local people explain that this pattern represents the Miao people who had 12 branches of their ancestral tribe before migrating to Southern China. Some Miao people say it symbolizes 12 eggs (the Miao people believe that they originate from eggs). The rest of the people believe that it represents the water buffalo’s “whirlpool”. Water buffalo are
extremely important to the Miao people, because the Miao people typically sacrifice water buffalo to worship their ancestors and they use them as labor to plow the land. Those historical facts are reflected in the batiks’ patterns through different motifs in Danzhai.

Figure 4: The Miao people have different interpretations about the 12 “spin” patterns that are typical in their batik. Photo taken by author.
III. Theoretical framework

Anthropology of art theory is the study of the arts within their socio-cultural contexts. In this discipline the arts are regarded not only as aesthetic objects but as embodying symbolic meanings and social functions in people's lives (Layton, 1991; Marcus & Myers, 1995). Development theory is applied to examine a fundamental paradox between government policies and indigenous strategy. In this paradox, Danzhai people have encountered increasing contradiction in the face of modernization and globalization, spurred by the commercialization of their work. Tourism theory is concerned with examining the controversial purpose of batik commoditization as a means to attract tourists and exotic others, which leads to a loss of batik’s authenticity, creating “endangered cultures” (Taylor, 2001) and culture change. The intersections of these three theoretical frameworks allow for an examination of batik as cultural development, commercialization, and social change in Danzhai of China.

Anthropologists explain the cultural meanings and social functions in the context of arts (Gell, 1998; Layton, 1991; Marcus & Myers, 1995). As Clifford Geertz (1973) noted, the arts are a cultural system “expressed in symbolic forms” (p. 89). Alfred Gell (1998) also suggested that an anthropology of art focuses on the social context of “art production, circulation, and reception” rather than the evaluation of particular works of art (p. 7). Furthermore, according to Acord et al’s (2008) opinions, anthropologists examine “the tastes/lifestyles of tribes that gather around particular art forms and the complex institutional networks involved in shaping, producing and disseminating cultural artifacts”
Anthropologists have explored visual arts and material culture in terms of symbolic meanings, representational function, social status, ethnic identity, and cultural politics (Kerlogue, 2000; Layton, 1991; Marcus & Myers, 1995; Schein, 2000; Swallow, 1987). In *Painting Culture: the making of an aboriginal high art*, Myers (2002) questions what is “authentic” or “primitive” art. Through his fieldwork in Australia, he considers painting arts of aboriginal people, “its practices and meanings, as a historical activity in contexts of individuated production, changing audiences and economies of knowledge, and commercial exchange” (p. 57).

Globalization often leads to cultural homogenization and diversification. Liu (2004) notes that China began a development project of “reform and opening up” in the 1980s, which resulted in China giving up the planned economy and embracing the market economy, which has actively integrated it into globalization (Liu, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, the Chinese government has recognized that culture can be a significant economic resource for development. “Cultural Development” became a slogan and a policy initiated by the government, which was implemented in ethnic minority regions. In fact, the policy of “Cultural Development” in China means a strategy of commodification of traditional culture in an era of marketization. This policy implementation facilitates local cultural autonomy, preservation, economics and social integration. In *Cultural Strategies of Development: Implications for Village Governance in China* (Oakes, 2006), in discussing “the implications of China’s cultural strategies of regional development for local level governance” (p. 13), Oakes asserts that “cultural strategies create economic
value where none before existed and thus initiate new struggles over ownership among villagers, state actors and entrepreneurs. The privatization of cultural resources has presented new challenges to village governance even while it has been promoted as both an answer to the fiscal challenges faced by many rural communities” (p. 17). The work of batik development has been invaluable in demonstrating the challenges and influences of the specific implementation of the “Cultural Development” policy, but raises a concern for how cultural development becomes paradoxical in China.

Batik commercialization is a case of “culture for sale” and commoditization in tourism that scholars have discussed (Daniel, 1996; Grünewald, 2002; Shepherd, 2002; Wittmayer, 2010; Witz, Rassool, & Minkley, 2001). As China actively pursues modernization, “tourism has emerged as an effective vehicle for synthesizing some of the differences through its contribution to the modernization process, its utilization of heritage for product development, and its role in meeting some socialist objectives” (Sofield & Li, 1998, p. 362). The tourism industry has increasingly recognized and capitalized on traditionally natural resources. In this context, “Tourism… is not merely a business. It is also about the packaging of images that represent the society and its past” (Witz et al., 2001, p. 277).

A complex connection exists between tourism and cultural change (Rojek, 1997; Wood, 1980). Tourism’s role results in enormous social and cultural change in the commodification of culture, which leads minority ethnic groups to lose the “authenticity” of their arts and to sell their culture (Rojek, 1997; Shepherd, 2002). Tourism also lead to
the cultural commoditization, as tourists with a discriminative “eye” and a view of seeking novelty to peek the “authentic”, “primitive” and “colorful” local minority ethnic groups’ production in terms of costumes, customs, feasts and handicrafts (Gell, 1998, p. 2; Wilson & Ypeij, 2012). Through its association with the exotic and commoditization, minority ethnic culture therefore becomes involved in a complex context in which “issues of power and representation are continually tested and contested” (Aitchison, 2001, p. 133; Rojek, 1997).

Butler and Hinch (2012) argue that in the complexities of globalization, ethnic arts and indigenous cultures are valued for their competitive advantage and uniqueness (Butler & Hinch, 2012). However, there is a range of challenges and threats that indigenous people may encounter when they have to overcome the global market (Butler & Hinch, 2012). For example, Reading Threads: Clothing, Ethnicity, and Place in Southwest China by Stevan Harrell (2009) presents examples of ethnic clothing and textiles to illustrate the process of producing handcrafts, and how textiles embody the identity and ethnicity (2009). Harrell argues that, through the materials, colors, techniques, and patterns, textiles express people’s gender, age, social status and ethnic identity (2009). Schneider (1987) adds that hand-made cloth and fabrics communicate meanings and artistic taste. He maintains that studying the role of cloth consumption helps to understand the social relations and the social identities. The stylistic change of cloth is relevant to political and economic shifts (Hann, 1992; Schneider, 1987; Swallow, 1987). Batik has special cultural significance (Swallow, 1987).
Building on Batik: the Globalization of a Craft Community presents a case study of batik production in an era of globalization, by analyzing market pressure and relationship among crafts, culture and technological change (Hitchcock & Nuryanti, 2000). Worker, Middlewomen, Entrepreneur: Women in the Indonesian Batik Industry portrays a commercialization activity of batik production in Indonesia where women make batik for household consumption and trade it in local markets, concluding that local governments support indigenous entrepreneurs and stimulate new business ventures in rural areas (Rebecca, 1987).

In order to understand the shifting of batik’s cultural meaning and social function and examine the development plight of Danzhai batik, it is necessary to explore traditional batik, China’s development policies, and social change in Danzhai.
What is batik? How do the Miao people make it?

Batik is a method of dyeing textile in which melted wax is applied by hand to the fabric in order to leaving the waxed parts uncolored. Batik was named “La Xie” in ancient China and is now called wax printing, which is one of three basic dyeing methods in China (the other dyeing methods are Bandhnu and Calico). Ancient China has been depicted by many writers as having traditional well-off families: “men plowing, women weaving and children reading” (Bai 白 & Tian 田, 2011, p. 19). Plowing represents agriculture, weaving represents making textiles, reading represents cultural education, and “men plowing, women weaving and children reading” is a typical microcosm of the traditional Chinese life. So batik as a technique of making textile was significant for traditional Chinese. “People ‘wrote’ their own histories and identities into their textile arts and costume designs” (Lingley, 2009, p. 113). Their clothes, bags, sheets and gifts, were mostly made with batiks. Their stories, aesthetic concepts and worldview can also be read through batik.

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1 The Bandhnu method is a means of tying, twisting, knotting, pinching, etc. The Calico (or "spotted") method is a means of pressing the object that is carved in the pattern with ink to produce the desired image.
Generally, the process of making batik includes producing fabric, warming bee wax, making indigo\textsuperscript{2} solution, painting wax, dyeing, and de-waxing. The main tools of making batik are a 5-inch-long bamboo handle, with one end being an ax-shaped copper clip as the wax knife, and a dye vat made by firs. The Miao people use a wax knife to paint on the fabric that is a typical Zanthoxylum\textsuperscript{3} pattern textile. This textile is handmade by the Miao people. The batik’s dye material, indigo, is planted and home-made by the Miao people.

The first step of making batik is warming the bee wax juice, spreading the fabric on a desk, and then painting the pattern with a wax knife dipped in wax juice. This the Miao people usually improvise to paint what they want to draw. Admirably, the Miao people

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\textsuperscript{2} Indigo is an herb the stem of which is less than one meter high, which flowers in July and is harvested in September. The stems and leaves of indigo are collected, mixed with lime, and then the indigo dye solution is made through fermentation.

\textsuperscript{3} Zanthoxylum is an evergreen tree or shrub. Its fruits and seeds have a special shape.
draw straight lines and circles by hands without ruler or compass. They paint all kinds of patterns such as flowers, birds, fish, and grass from their observation of life, as well as memory learnt from their tradition. When they complete the patterns, the Miao people put the wax fabric into the indigo dye vat to dye. Each dyeing lasts approximately 20 to 30 minutes; then they scoop it out to dry, so that the dye is oxidized. A sequential dye procedure is repeated at least seven times to make a blue color deep. The last procedure is de-waxing through boiling the wax-treated fabric, melting the wax, rinsing it, and washing it away as well as drying it up. Finally the de-waxed parts of the fabric appear white, while parts without wax are blue, to form a blue background with a white foreground. The entire batik-making process is completed.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 6: The Miao girls use the wax knife to paint a batik pattern on the fabric. Photo provided by Guanghua Wang.
Figure 7: The last procedure of making batik is de-waxing through boiling wax fabric, melting wax, rinsing it, washing it away as well as drying it up. Photo Provided by Xiaohai Huang.

**The cultural meanings of traditional batik**

Traditional batik patterns have many cultural symbolic meanings. The dragon, for example is the omnipotent mascot, and the butterfly, according to local legend, is the primitive mother of the Miao people. When the butterfly made love with the water bubble, it laid 12 eggs. A bird named “Jiyu” hatched these eggs and from these eggs came a dragon, tiger, thunder, centipede, wildcat, pangolin and other animals. There remained two eggs that would not hatch. After a while, these two eggs became a man and a woman who are regarded as the Miao people’s ancestors. Because the dragon and humans were born from
the same mother (butterfly), the Miao people believe that the dragon can be regarded as a totem to fight off evil ghosts and bless the Miao with rain during periods of drought, ensuring a good harvest.

Another pattern, the flower, is regarded as the symbol of the female and a sign of love. In the past, Miao girls could not have any formal education. Usually, a girl’s talent and intelligence were assessed only through her drawing of batik flowers. The flowers, therefore, are synonymous with the girl and a sign of love.

Fish with bird patterns are intended to praise reproductive capabilities of humans. In the concept of fertility for the Miao people, the fish’s reproductive capacity is the strongest. When Miao people are married, they need fish to be sacrificed to their ancestors, thus praying to have more offspring. In addition, Danzhai people believe that birds represent males and fish represent females. Fish and birds together is a metaphor of a loving couple.

There are various other batik patterns that include geometric designs, animals, birds, insects, and plants. These batik patterns have multiple symbolic meanings: there can be flowers inside a non-flower design, animals that are not beasts, combinations of men and beasts, and of animals and plants which symbolize the connection between people, animals, people, and plants, and animals and nature.

**The aesthetical philosophy of traditional batik**

The Miao people draw the traditional batik pattern with unique indigenous thoughts, which represent their unique aesthetic philosophy. They put the bird's body onto the body of a fish, adding fish scales; and sometimes borrow butterfly wings mounted on the bird’s
body. In these transformational patterns, the abstracted, exaggerated, and deformed patterns follow the principles of “full composition.” For instance, in drawing animals’ limbs, feet, eyes, or ears, double angle, whether profile or full face, should all be revealed. So in Danzhai batik, there are many double eyes on birds, dragon’s eyes, and fish. Following the principle of “full composition,” even if the body is out of proportion, it is rarely “blank reservation.”

Figure 8: Danzhai batik follows the principles of “full composition” in aesthetic philosophy. Photo taken from (Museum 贵州省群众艺术馆, 1960, p. 3)

Danzhai batik patterns are drawn using a rich imagination and exaggerated style. The content of drawing patterns is mainly based on the flowers, birds, insects, fish, butterfly,

4 “Blank reservation”, is one of the main techniques of Chinese traditional painting and an important aesthetic concept of Chinese ancient philosophy. It means to create a sense of space leaving the audience to unlimited imagination. It does not allow too full for paint something in the blank in terms of composition and space.
and other objects in the natural environment around them. It does not accurately express the natural world, but through their observations, experience, refining, and creating, the Miao people used abstracted stylistic art to express their ideas and worldviews (Wang & Wang, 2012, p. 13). These patterns are characterized by exaggerated deformation and a number of combinational techniques (Wang & Wang, 2012, p. 13). For instance, the tail of a golden pheasant is painted as a bunch of buds; the crest is painted as a flower, a pomegranate, or a peach. The body of a bird is painted into the body of the fish. The bird's wing is changed into a butterfly wing (Song, 2010, p. 106; Wang & Wang, 2012, p. 13). With bold imagination, concise and vivid lines, the Miao people create batik patterns without any limitation. The Miao people usually say, “We are free to draw what we think.” The pattern of birds, insects, fish, butterflies and other objects are interchangeable and conjunctional, based on the Miao people’s philosophy that the life of people with animal, plants, and insects in the world are equal, interchangeable and that they intercommunicate.

The social function of traditional batik

Batik is very important to the traditional society of the Miao people in that it has special social function. The Miao people use batik to document their social history, totemism, mythology, religion, and daily lifestyles. Their clothes, bags, sheets and gifts are mostly made by batik, which is a necessary practical item for them.

Batik patterns make up a cultural element that distinguishes the Miao people from other ethnic groups, who can distinguish each other from batik material, technique, color, line, and pattern. Within a large region of many ethnic groups, the styles, patterns, and
techniques of batik reveal exactly where people come from and to which ethnic branch of the Miao tribes they belong to by their batik.

Making batik has a specific social function for defining the Miao woman. In Danzhai, the Miao women are honored to have a set of clothing left from their elders. When a woman gets married, she must make a set of batik clothes as a dowry. If she does have not have one, she may find it difficult to find a boyfriend or may be ashamed to get married. A Miao woman I spoke with said, “In Miao village, it is a shame if a woman cannot do batik. It would be very hard to find a boyfriend to marry her.” She then added, “If girl is very good at batik or embroidery, she will be seen as more beautiful, sophisticated, and will be more respected.” Through making batik craft, the Miao women have shared their life’s knowledge and experience with each other and trained the next generation to preserve their culture. Traditionally, the Miao women bring their girls together to make the batik. The home is the main place in which culture is communicated and inherited. They use batik to write the Miao people’s history, represent their cultural identity, and include a basic life skill in their livelihoods.

![Figure 9: Miao girl’s batik dowry. Photo provided by Fang Yang](image)

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V. China Development Policy and Tourism

Since the early 1980s, due to the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, the Chinese government has recognized that culture is a significant “soft power” and regional development resource, similar to economic resources and natural resources. In this background, the government initiated “Cultural Development” as a slogan and policy. As Oakes (1999) notes, the term of “Cultural Development” “encompasses the Chinese state’s twin goals of regional political and economic integration along with the nurturing of a national civic culture based on the ideals of socialism” (p. 51). This policy is frequently implemented to accelerate the development of ethnic minority areas; but in China, “Cultural Development” actually means a policy or a strategy of commodification of traditional culture in an era of marketization, and facilitates local cultural autonomy, preservation, economic development, and social integration (Oakes, 1999, p. 51).

“Cultural Development,” tourism and commercialization

The Guizhou provincial government increasingly recognizes the lag in economic development, but points to strong “Cultural Development” as an opportunity to improve the economy. Although Guizhou’s economic development is lagging behind, it retains the precious wealth of cultural resources, which can be regarded as prosperity to facilitate the
development of Guizhou, and that can be regarded at a comparative advantage to seize the initiative in the fierce regional competition.

In recent decades, pushed by the huge dynamic of marketization in China, the Guizhou provincial government has had a very strong desire to accelerate economic development. As the Guizhou government claims, “We must accelerate the pace of economic and social development, and further establish cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence, with efforts to convert potential culture resources into a cultural development advantage. The developmental goal is to promote the province's ethnic development, and to write an amazing story of ‘Guizhou development’” (Anonymous, 2011, p. 1).

According to Guizhou’s developmental government plan, called “the 12th five-year plan”, the cultural industry will achieve more than 5% of the Guizhou’s province GDP and become the pillar industry of Guizhou’s national economy. This will ensure that Guizhou’s people have a high degree of cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence for development (Anonymous, 2011, p. 1).
In this context, Guizhou’s government regards the traditional culture of its minority ethnic groups as a resource to exploit for the needs of commercialism and capital industries. In the name of development, they have pursued this economic interest in order to eradicate poverty and increase householders’ incomes. At the same time, minority ethnic groups have lost the traditional culture by selling old traditional culture as a commodity. Because the government has also emphasized preserving the culture with developmental culture (as opposed to the cultural policy of the Cultural Revolution era, in which the Chinese opposed and destroyed all traditional culture), there are many “authentic” ethnic crafts and arts it encourages to preserve and develop as an industry. This is conducive to enhancing local peoples’ cultural pride and fostering ethnic identity.
In the discourse of “Cultural Development”, the government also initiated tourism among ethnic minority groups, and facilitated their development of a cultural industry with a commercial purpose. Tourism has led to rapid social and cultural change in Guizhou. Guizhou has 17 ethnic groups who have rich minority cultures in areas such as textiles, architecture, customs, arts, and special local products. These are unique and scarce resources that are used as a means to attract tourists and develop the tourist industry. Under local government implementation, local people are encouraged to improve their income by actively participating in the development of tourism. Tourism takes credit for establishing over 3,000 countryside villages which exhibit local authentic cultural goods to attract tourists. Tourism helps indigenous people to alleviate their poverty. Consequently, indigenous people produce many products for tourists, such as batik, rice wine, dresses, silver, and jewelry.

Many authorities and organizations have recognized the significance of this “countryside tourism model”, in which the government launched local people to put rich ethnic culture and natural resource advantages into advantages of the tourist industry. In 2010 the cultural industry revenue of Guizhou province reached 32.165 billion Yuan (12.629 billion Yuan of tourism revenue), accounting for 2.44% of GDP (Zhang 张. & Wang 王, 2013). The government has organized a series of themed activities of “Colorful Guizhou” for cultural exhibition, including the competition of ethnic minority singing and dance, cultural photography of ethnic festivals, and craft competitions. These activities
produce an enormous economic growth of approximately 40 billion Yuan (Zhang 张 & Wang 王, 2013).

Figure 11: The Miao people participated a themed activity of “Colorful Guizhou” for cultural exhibition which are organized by Guizhou government. Photo provided by Fang Yang

Livelihoods, income, and women cooperatives

“Cultural Development” and tourism in Daznhai has far-reaching effects on the local Miao people. The main purpose of “Cultural Development” is to develop economic industry because Daznhai is a very poor country. Most of the Miao people live beneath the national poverty level (Shen 申, 2006; Zhang 张 & Liu 刘, 1992, p. 2). Actively participating in marketization and modernization, the Miao people can produce their handcraft in exchange for other material needs. Influenced by tourism, they are increasingly aware that their unique minority ethnic culture is a potential resource to sell.
For instance, when the Miao people see that tourists and foreigners are interested in their batik handcraft, they begin to sell their batik to improve their livelihoods. Therefore, transforming from a tradition to a tourist commodity, the social function and cultural meanings of Danzhai batik has changed drastically. The Miao people cater their batik design to the taste of Han-Chinese or Western countries. For instance, when I interviewed Miao people in the Paidao village, they told me that, in the past, batik was very inexpensive. Now the same piece of batik costs almost 50 RMB (equal approximately 8 dollars). The value of the goods sold has increased and now they actually receive cash for their sales. This exchange allows them to buy what they need, like soap, salt and modern clothing.

Figure 12: The Miao women spent one day to draw one piece of batik costing almost 50 RMB (approximately 8 dollars). Photo taken by author.
In the past, batik products were primarily created for an individual or for a family. Now, things are very different, as the need for products has increased due to demands from market, tourists, and companies. More Miao women work together to register a cooperative with the government’s permission. These kinds of cooperatives are characterized by being of the same clan or good friends. Each cooperative must has a capable leader in charge of the batik production. It also requires an additional leader to explore the market. When cooperatives receive an order from a customer, they work together to get the order filled. Because batik is a handcraft, they usually separate the task. The handcraft is paid for by the piece. These cooperatives are often like a family-owned business. The business is normally operated on a small scale and is very flexible. Now in Danzhai, there are many more cooperatives that have been spurred on by the marketization and recent government policies. Now that the batik industry is supported by the government’s “minority ethnic culture and persevering intangible cultural heritage” policy (Guizhou government, 2012), many cooperatives can receive a small amount of subsidy. Because of fierce competition among cooperatives and batik artists, this means there is great potential for conflict.

The cooperatives also face competition from large batik companies. For instance, in Danzhai, there are some companies invested in by businessmen. These businessmen come from the more developed areas of China. They earn high profits from Danzhai because the labor of Danzhai batik is much cheaper. These businessmen sell batik products to the more developed areas of China, the East Asian market, America and Europe. For instance, the
cost of one piece of batik, raw material plus labor, is $15. They can sell it in the more
developed areas of China or in Japan for approximately $400. Some specialists call this
“Internal Colonialism (Scott, 2009, pp. 12-13),” since a huge imbalance and disparity
exists between the developed and developing areas, urban and rural, the majority Han
Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China. In this context, the companies exploit the
Miao people by buying the batik at the lowest price and paying cheap wages. However,
these companies facilitate local government in developing the batik industry and resolving
some of the poverty issues in Danzhai. The Miao people cooperate with government,
businessmen, cooperatives and companies so that they can sell the traditional batik at a low
price, but still improve their living conditions. Batik has become a commodity to produce
and sell.

VI. BATIK DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Economic and cultural globalization propels rapid social change. In most social
process of development, there are three different types of social change: “emergent
change,” “transformative change,” and “projectable change” (Reeler, 2005, p. 7). Social
change always evolves “in processes of development, as individuals, as communities”
(Reeler, 2005, p. 2). Change in social demand for handcrafts results in a change of the
handcraft production’s techniques, shapes, and styles, and the social change can be
reflected in those changes (Underhill, 2002, p. 2).
Explanations for changes in handcrafts must consider the social demand and the meaning of handcrafts in a historical context. They must explore how people use handcraft to “negotiate social relationships,” and analyze its presentation and consumption in different contexts (Underhill, 2002, p. 2). Compared to a few decades ago in Dazhain, the Miao people’s lives have changed dramatically. Experiencing rapid social change, the Miao people now wear the same current fashions as people in the city. They want the exciting city life that it is often portrayed on TV. Their ideas and life styles are constantly changing. Consequently, their present social demands are different from that of traditional society. This is a key factor resulting in batik’s change in production technique, motif pattern, cultural meaning, and social function.

Culture changes: batik’s cultural meaning, social function have changed

Traditional batik was always handmade in Dazhain. The finished craft normally takes an entire year to complete due to the limitation of raw materials availability in different seasons. Nowadays, the Miao people can buy textiles from the markets, many of which are made by machine. Some cooperatives use a machine technique to produce fake batik in bulk quantities, and use chemical dyeing solutions rather than pure raw materials. These changes in technique reflect the cultural meaning of change in traditional batik products.
Because traditional batik was completely handmade, the Miao people could weave different patterns to represent different meanings on the textile. Now the textile has lost its diversity due to the bulk production. The Miao people believe that the traditional batik dyeing solution is similar to a person’s life. In life there are situations that need something added (such as wine). Then it’s the proper time to rest (time to ferment). Because it’s a natural indigo dyeing solution, the Miao people think this solution is very holy. So they will perform some rituals to combat evil spirits and dirty things. For instance, they believe that unclean (sinful) people should not touch the batik dyeing solution, because it can easily bring some filthy (sinful) things into the dyeing solution. Nowadays, when people use the chemical dyeing solution, the traditional cultural meaning is lost. The chemical
The dyeing solution is harmful to the body. The Miao people call these kinds of batik “fake batik”. Furthermore, the skill of drawing batik has also changed. The traditional hand drawing of batik doesn’t require a lot of science. It is generally based upon what they like to do in their leisure time. The Miao people made batik for gifts, festival dresses, and wedding dresses with great care and a holy attitude. Nowadays, they make it simply to earn money and sell as a commodity. Comparing the traditional drawing style to the modern drawing style, the modern style appears rough and not smooth. When observing various styles of batik, it is easy to distinguish what is traditional and what is modern. In addition, driven by economic power, Danzhai modern batik is produced faster and the strokes look rougher. On the other hand, traditional batik takes a long time to make and requires more detailed work. Unfortunately, traditional batik production appears to be gradually fading away.

As to the social function, the traditional society of Miao people made the traditional batik for their daily life needs, but now it’s made for cash which will greatly improve their living conditions. Some batik cooperatives are driven by marketization and tourism, which has changed their core purpose to commercial purpose rather than focusing on meeting life’s basic needs. They now make batik as wall hangings, tourist merchandise, and art. Also, the Miao young girl does not regard the traditional batik cloth as a desirable wedding cloth any more. She can now buy a wedding dress from the market or choose to wear a modern wedding dress.
Local government regards batik as a tourist industry to develop the regional economy. When the government has an investment conference or is celebrating the Miao festival, it will use Danzhai batik as a cultural representation to highlight the remarkable ethnicity of the Danzig Miao people. This will certainly distinguish them from other regional cultures as a political strategy. Media and government have created an exotic imagination that Danzhai Miao people are by nature very good at dancing, singing, and drawing batik to attract more people to their region for tourism. The old craft of traditional batik has become a thing of the past. Now batik has become Danzhai’s cultural symbol and a tourist commodity to develop the economic industry and attract tourists for consumption.

Figure 14: When the government initiative celebrates the Miao festival, they will use Danzhai batik as a cultural representation to highlight the remarkable ethnicity of the Danzig Miao people. Photo provided by Fang Yang.
In terms of aesthetic philosophy and cultural value, the traditional values and the worldview of the Miao people in Danzhai have changed due to the impact of the market economy and modernization. As a recent example, a large number of surplus laborers from the Miao community have joined the trend of labor migration. In Miao villages most young people work outside the home, and they have gradually accepted the values of the developed areas (Jiang 蒋, 2011). In addition, film, television, and media exposure in the remote Miao villages and have sharply accelerated the change in traditional culture. In the traditional society, due to their remote geographic location among mountains and canyons, they knew little of the outside world. Miao people’s values and aesthetic criteria were derived from following their ancestral culture. However, when the Miao people gained access to the outside world, they began to know, compare, and adopt aspects of this new culture. Consequently, their values, particularly those of the younger generation, have changed due to the enticements of pursuing greater wealth and knowledge in the outside world. They have a totally different perspective and their values show in their life attitudes, standards of beauty, and concepts of happiness.

**Contesting batik: globalization, cultural politics and development**

As Washabaugh (2000) writes in a review of *Contesting Art* (MacClancy, 1997), “material objects and processes of artistic production are profoundly tied to social relations and therefore art and discourses about art influence and reflect social life” (p. 347). Embedded in globalization, modernization, and running through cultural politics, I realized Danzhai batik involves a different power relationship and “position” in a game of
contesting development. The Miao people want a better lifestyle so they can enjoy all that modern culture offers. One villager said, “City people and foreigners admire our wood houses, fresh vegetables, and unique ethnic culture, but we, who are so poor, admire them because they have a car, TV and a modern dress.” One local intellectual claimed, “We should have the same rights to enjoy the modernization achievement as an urban citizen.” In modernization, the state and local governments try to convert the cultural and natural resources into capital.

In Danzhai, batik has become cultural and economic capital for development. According to the local government’s position, Danzhai has no modern enterprise such as manufacturing or mining. In order to develop the local economy and help eradicate poverty, they must develop tourism and highlight the ethnic culture to attract more travelers and consumers. Ways to create an ethnic cultural village model should include ethnic handcrafts such as batik, brocade, and other local specialties such as rice wine and ethnic foods.

Batik also engages cultural politics in Danzhai. In the discourse of “Cultural Development,” Danzhai batik is constructed as Miao’s ethnic identity and culture representation because of “they are what they wear” and “their wear is where their live” (Harrell, 2009). Through local government efforts, Danzhai batik has been identified as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage approved by state council. The news of this acclaimed event was advertised in the newspaper and on TV in order to draw attention to tourists and foreigners. The government often uses the batik as gifts to build public
relations and attract capital investments. In this context, batik becomes a “dependence gift” with many political meanings.

Figure 15: The government often uses the batik as cultural advertisement to attract capital investments in different presentations and culture exhibitions. Photo provided by Manli Ning.

Meanwhile, Danzhai batik’s fame is used as a cultural symbol to attract the tourist or businessman. When the Danzhai government has a conference, they always claim “We are the county of China!” “We have authentic and primitive arts from ‘the bird’s tribe,’” “Danzhai welcomes you!” Through these slogans and advertisements, the local government and media can create an image that translates “authentic, exotic and primitive.” This is accomplished by displaying many beautiful girls and wonderful handcrafted arts for tourists and foreigners to see and consume. As Louisa Schein (2000) says in *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics*, this
phenomenon can be described as a “feminization of China's minorities” that is now happening in Danzhai (Schein, 2000).

Figure 16: The Miao people were portrayed as a “feminization” in the tourism. Photo provided by Manli Ning

As a result of globalization and cultural politics, Danzhai Miao people’s traditional batik production mode and lifestyle have been experiencing significant changes. When one walks into the village, one can see how Western culture, mass media, and the widespread use of industrialized products have spread throughout the Miao lifestyle. It has greatly impacted the people’s traditional lifestyle in that the younger generation no longer wears traditional batik clothing. Their walls are covered with stickers depicting their favorite TV or sports star. The women no longer talk about whose skill is the best or the prettiest. Instead, they want to talk about their neighbor who is a migrant worker that earns more.
money, which makes them believe they would be happier in an urban lifestyle. Batik’s status is increasingly fading away from the Miao people’s daily life.

Furthermore, with the impact of tourism development and globalization, more and more batik products are produced in Danzhai villages, entering the market and the city, and are recognized by many tourists and foreigners. However, due to the commercialization of batik, the low-quality problems have become more serious. In order to meet the demands of the market and reap a short-term economic benefit, factories must use machines. Although they are capable of producing a high volume of these textiles in a short amount of time, the quality of production is very poor. Unfortunately the younger generation of the Miao people is willing to practice this inferior style of batik. Consequently, as the folk artist passes away, many ancient batik patterns are gradually lost because few people can master it.

Figure 17: Batik is encountering the crisis in inheritance, as the folk artist passes away, many ancient batik patterns are gradually lost because few people can master it. Photo provided by Fang Yang.
The traditional Danzhai way of making batik is time-consuming, complicated, high in labor costs, and not as profitable. Therefore, many of the younger generations do not want to learn and engage in painting waxes. Compared to previous generations, the value and lifestyle of the younger generation of Miao people has changed drastically, resulting in a decreased number of batik artists. Fewer young people desire to learn the batik craft. Batik artists who can master the skill of painting wax using ancient patterns are hard to find. Although in Danzhai there are many small-scale family workshops, they lack funding and incentive. These workshops suffer disorderly competition under the control of foreign capital and lack of specific market positioning. Hence the traditional Danzhai batik handcraft is facing a real crisis of survival and development.

Danzhai batik brings up many questions such as how to protect cultural heritage and pass the traditional handcraft to the next generation, and how to have the strong competition in the marketization and cultural development. Danzhai Miao people are still confused about who are they and where they are going in the process of modernization. They feel that they have to passively accept different development strategies and policies, and have to deal with modernization and cultural adaptation issues. How can the traditional cultural heritage be preserved and the Miao people keep their identity? How can their cultural and economic value be proportional to their efforts of making batik, and improve their standard of living? How can they keep the subjectivity in the process of the cultural development? Some strategies need to be adopted to avoid marginalization when batik immerses in cultural capital and becomes market-oriented. These strategies need to be
directed towards preventing batik from becoming a tool of external capital in which the main focus is profit. In addition to the points made above, efforts need to be made to maintain the Miao’s ethnic cultural identity and dignity during the development process.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As can be seen from the above discussion, Danzhai batik has experienced a significant amount of social change. Traditional batik is a necessary useful item for local people. Their clothes, bags, sheets and gifts were mostly made of batik. Making batik was a necessary basic skill for every woman. Their stories, aesthetic concepts, and worldviews can be read through batik. Since the 1980s, however, “Cultural Development” and tourism in Danzhai have caused far-reaching effects on the local Miao People, as batik became a cultural commodity as tourist products for sale. It has been reduced from being a part of everyday traditional life and having various social functions and cultural meaning to predominantly being a tourist commodity.
Nowadays, the hand-made batik being a part of every day traditional life is gradually fading away.

In this transition process of Danzhai batik, we can view the social change in Danzhai as a profile reflecting modern China and the plight of the development of minority ethnic groups. Batik has involved different powers in contestation of globalization, capital, and cultural politics. The power of globalization facilitates Danzhai Miao people participating in modernization and selling their traditional culture as a commodity. In the discourse of “Cultural Development”, Danzhai batik is expressed as the Miao’s ethnic identity and culture representation. Meanwhile, with commercialization, Danzhai batik handcraft is facing the crisis of survival development. Meanwhile, with increasing Han Chinese assimilation in the process of modernization, younger generations of Miao people are confused about their ethnic identity and cultural continuity. Tourism produces an image of the “authentic, exotic and primitive” with many beautiful girls and wonderful handcraft
arts for tourists and foreigners to imagine and consume, bringing a great amount of income for the tourism industry. In the meantime, it also leads to significant cultural losses.

Although Danzhai Miao people encounter many plights and challenges, Danzhai is propelled by multiple forces to develop increasing batik production and increasing market demand. There are many batik cooperatives and batiks workshops and small-scale companies making batik. This results in an increasing pattern of differentiation and increasing numbers of batik product users and businessmen. Furthermore, some development projects in Danzhai, such as “The Guizhou Indigenous Batik Development Program” initiated by CiTi Bank, are embedded with a proud ethnic consciousness of the Miao people, and are enhancing the Miao peoples’ cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence in the modern society. In addition, “tradition” is always being revived and reinvented. Danzhai batik has new social functions, cultural meanings, and representations. It will play a specialized role within Miao’s ethnic culture, in people’s lives, and in exhibitions. As Harrell (2009, p. 111) says “Traditions will continue to evolve.” Danzhai batik will continue to exist in China for a long time.
Figure 19: For sustaining cultural continuity in Danzhai, a development project in Danzhai, “The Guizhou Indigenous Batik Development Program”, enhances the Miao peoples’ cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence in the modern society. Photo provided by Xiaomei Wang.

Recommendations

Currently, Danzhai Miao people increasingly realize that they encounter many development issues, such as preserving Miao identity and traditional culture, maintaining cultural continuity, and enhancing their competitiveness in the market. The key question is: how do the Miao people become the protagonists in development? The goal should be how to develop Danzhai batik industry and still be able to protect the Miao culture. No matter what the perspective, we should pay attention to the following: First, we must respect the
Miao people’s worldviews and aesthetic understandings of the value and significance of the culture. Second, batik patterns should be put into their natural, social, historical, and cultural environment to be explained and understood, not to be viewed in isolation. Third, to be aware of the important artistic value of Danzhai batik, we must document and record the traditional patterns and techniques of Danzhai batik with urgency, so as to avoid losing their precious culture.

Furthermore, it is necessary to protect the intellectual property of Danzhai batik and enhance the Miao people’s ability to compete economically. The modern Chinese market is an especially different market economy with no strictly ethnic rule to regulate it. The nature of the market economy is to put profit-seeking first. Driven by this logic, a lot of industrialized workshops and enterprises in Danzhai are market-oriented when they produce batiks. They cater to the tourists and foreign tastes instead of traditional patterns and aesthetic standards. They copy a lot of batik motif patterns with disrespect to the batiks artist’s intellectual property and pattern patent, so that the batik artist has little motivation to create a new pattern. Some of them turn to copying, which results in larger numbers of pirated and plagiarized batik patterns in the market. More and more traditional batik patterns and skills disappear. In addition, due to the lack of economic capital and marketing ability, it is not guaranteed that the Miao people will be market players. It is difficult for them to become the real beneficiaries of the capitalization of ethnic culture and the tourism industry, and it possibly leads to the loss the subjectivity in the community development.
Danzhai cultural heritage, such as batik heritage, is needed to establish an effective mechanism for active participation in the development of the local community. If more people realized that Danzhaizi cultural heritage is an important symbol of Miao culture, their cultural confidence and ethnic identity would be promoted. When the government implements “Cultural Development” and develops the tourism industry, the government should hear the voice of the Miao people in the process of making policy, since the government always takes a top-down way to decision-making, regardless of local people’s reaction. Although the trend of globalization and marketization is inevitable, the government should realize that the development is a holistic strategy, which cannot be simplified to economic development. In the development process, ethnic culture capitalization is only one way to improve their income and change their livelihoods, but it should be related to their social change and culture adaptation. Otherwise, it can be easily trapped in an “endangered culture” or “marginalized” status.
VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY


of Huang Ying Feng and the Evergrand Art Museum in Taoyuan, Taiwan (pp. 99-111): University of Hawai'i Art Gallery


