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Basketry among Two Peoples of Northern Guangxi, China

In this article, the authors introduce the present-day basketry practices found among two minority nationalities populations living today on the northern borders of China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region: the Baiku Yao of Lihu Yao Ethnic Township in Nandan County and the Dong of Tongle Miao Ethnic Township in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County. The manufacture, marketing, and use of varied basketry forms is discussed for each of these groups, setting up a concluding comparison that situates these basketry practices in relation to more celebrated textile arts heralded within the People's Republic of China's extensive system of intangible cultural heritage promotion.

Keywords: Baskets—crafts—intangible cultural heritage—China—Dong—Yao

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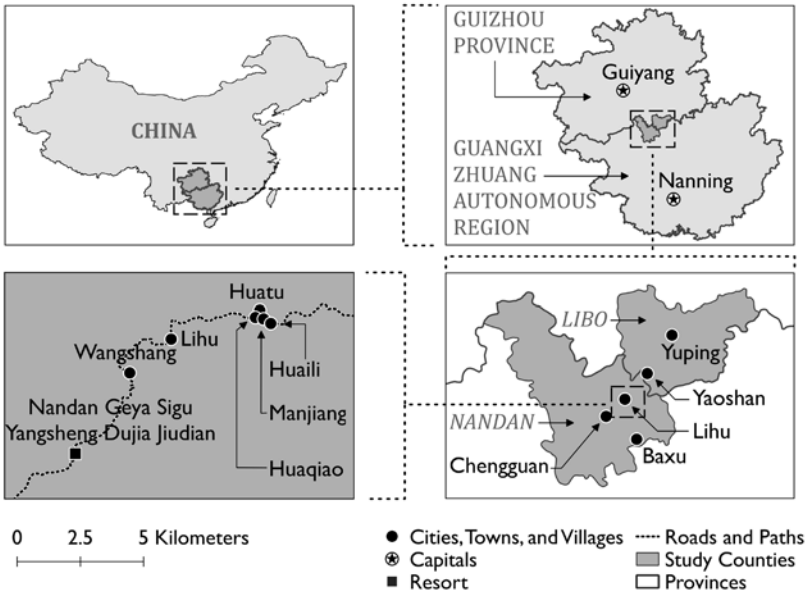
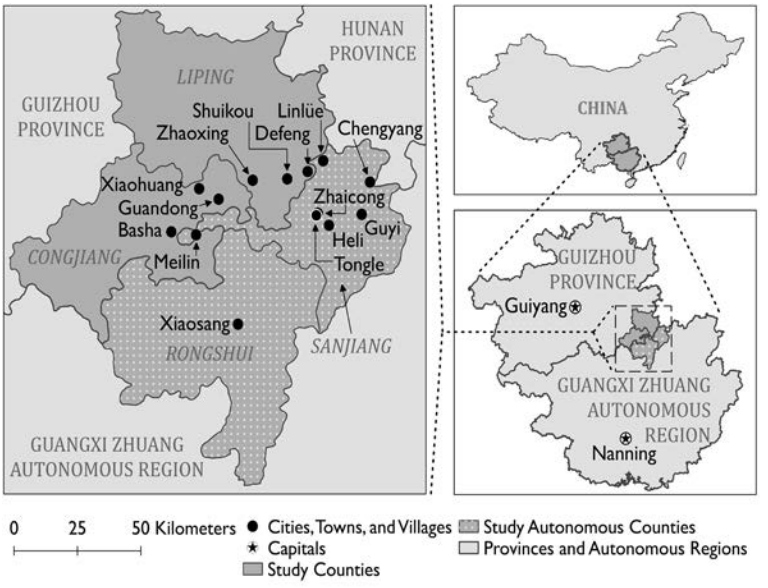
"My elder brother loves me. He made all kinds of baskets for me."—He Jinxiu

In this article we introduce bamboo basketry as found among two peoples of northern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Visited between 2016 and 2018 as part of a larger project concerned with the intersection of textile arts and intangible cultural heritage practices and policies among minority nationalities living in upland regions of Southwest China, we report here on basketry practices observed and documented in two different locales in Guangxi, both close to the autonomous region's border with Guizhou province (maps 1 and 2). We first consider aspects of the larger phenomenon among the Baiku Yao of Nandan County. After introducing basketry there, we present a comparable account of basketry among the southern Dong living about 190 km to the northeast in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County. In both instances, we work through three key stages within the life cycle of objects—making, circulating, and using (Glassie 1999, 41–86; Shukla 2008, 386–87). These two case studies provide evidence to underpin a comparison, which we take up in a final concluding section. There we will situate these basketry practices in relationship to more celebrated textile arts heralded within the People's Republic of China's extensive intangible cultural heritage system.[1]

Our studies of basketry in Southwest China derive from our participation within a larger program of binational cooperation and collaborative research led by the American Folklore Society and the China Folklore Society. That larger initiative began in 2007, and in 2013 a sub-project linking Chinese and US ethnographic museums and museum-oriented scholars was initiated (Dewhurst and Lloyd 2019; Jackson 2019; Lloyd 2017; MacDowell and Zhang 2016; Zhang and Song 2017). Various funding agencies have supported this larger program of work, with the Henry Luce Foundation providing keystone support crucial to the larger effort and to the securing of additional grant and in-kind resources. This research report arises from this museum sub-project, specifically its second phase (2017–2021). During this period, fieldwork in Guangxi was hosted and led by the Guangxi Museum of Nationalities (aka Anthropology Museum of Guangxi). Research team participants were drawn from the staffs of the host institution as well as from the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum, the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the Michigan State University Museum, the Museum of International Folk Art, and the Sanjiang Dong Ecomuseum.[2]



Map 1. A map (lower right) of the Baiku Yao region in Nandan and Libo Counties and, at a more local scale (lower left), sites in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township discussed in this article. Map by J. Paul Blekking (Tanager Mapping and Consulting LLC).



Map 2. A map (left) picturing Southern Dong and Miao communities visited by the research team, including Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County locations discussed in this article. Map by J. Paul Blekking (Tanager Mapping and Consulting LLC).

The important place of basketry in the lives of people living in rural areas in China's Southwest would be hard for any visitor to the region to miss. Baskets—mostly made of bamboo—take a very large number of forms, and these are put to a vast range of uses. While baskets can play a key role in domestic activities such as preparing oil tea (*youcha*) for a family's breakfast or even in profound and private rituals, it only requires driving past rice fields being worked or through rural towns filled with busy laborers to see baskets being used to support a vast range of practical activities. Despite a growing range of industrial goods, including plastic basket surrogates and skeuomorphs, that flow into this region's rural markets, bamboo baskets remain crucial tools central to both everyday life as well as to special moments such as festivals, rituals, and life-cycle events such as weddings (Jackson and Zhang 2019). The region's baskets are a nexus for a large amount of both cultural knowledge and cultural activity. Beyond their crucial use in life sustaining and life enhancing labor, their central place in key social and spiritual activities suggests that they are a fundamental element in people's lives in this region, despite their sometimes taken -for-granted status.

Despite their ubiquity and importance in not only China's Southwest but throughout the country, the scholarly literature on Chinese basketry is much smaller than that found for other relevant parts of East and Southeast Asia, where cognate and related basketry practices are found. For Borneo (Indonesia, Malaysia) (Sellato 2012), Japan (Butcher 2015; Cort and Nakamura 1994; Marks 2012), Philippines (Capistrano-Baker 1998; Lane 1986; McKay and Perez 2018; Silvestre 2000), Thailand (Cohen 2000), and other relevant nations there are overview works, in-depth studies, and exhibition catalogues that offer knowledge of both vernacular and elite basketry forms and practices, even if these literatures are still lacking in ethnographic detail and social particularity. For China though, the literature (especially in English) is skewed in the direction of elite, antique, collectable forms most closely associated with urban settings, Han populations, and eastern regions (Fan 2017; Garner 1966; Kwan 2010; Laufer 1925; but cf. Cai 2012, 2015; Kuhn 1980; Liu 2015). In focusing ethnographically on work baskets and the work of those involved in making, selling, and using practical basketry in minority nationalities areas of Southwest China, the research effort closest to our own is that of ethnobotanists Luo Binsheng, Selena Ahmed, and Long Chunlin (Luo, Ahmed, and Long 2020). Their work has centered on basketry in Sansui County, Guizhou, a location that is home to Miao and northern Dong communities well known for basketry production (Geary et al. 2003, 147). In the absence of specialized ethnographic studies of vernacular basketry, it is necessary to turn to general ethnographic accounts for the region, in which basketry is sometimes addressed directly (Geary et al. 2003, 146–47; Ou 2007, 71) but more often is touched on incidentally throughout a work as an outgrowth of the topic's central presence in people's lives (see for example Mueggler 2001, 71, 84, 199, passim; Ma 2013, 38, 62, 68, passim). We aspire, in this article and in related works, to help illuminate this neglected topic. In doing so, we also hope to contribute to broader comparative efforts related to both basketry around the world and to heritage studies within folklore studies and ethnology.

The larger survey project from which our two Guangxi cases are derived has involved investigating craft practices (particularly textile ones) and cultural heritage policies among the Bai people of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, northwestern Yunnan Province; Buyi (Buyei or Bouyei) people in Anshun Prefecture-Level City, southwestern Guizhou; Miao people in Liupanshui Prefecture-Level City, western Guizhou; Miao and Dong in Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, southeast Guizhou; Dong people in Liuzhou Prefecture-Level City, Guangxi; and Yao and Zhuang in Hechi Prefecture-Level City, Guangxi. Here we focus specifically on the case of the Baiku Yao in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township in Nandan County and Dong from Tongle Miao Ethnic Township in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County—both in Guangxi—but we draw context from our wider travels across these two provinces and one autonomous region within Southwest China. Each of the communities that we and our research partners have visited can be characterized as densely, but not solely, populated by the minority nationalities noted here and by broadly similar cultural adaptations to life in upland areas within the geophysical and cultural region known as the Southeast Asian Massif (Michaud, Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and Swain 2016).[3]

In the case studies presented here and within the larger project from which they come, we have combined survey and preliminary ethnographic fieldwork with the building of systematic museum collections. Our framework for ethnographic material culture studies emphasizes attending to the three realms of human activity that Pravina Shukla has characterized as the "sequential contexts" of "creation, communication, and consumption" that reveal the life history of objects (2008, 386–87; Glassie 1999, 41–86). Such histories have the capacity to illuminate the lives of people who make, give, sell, buy, and use things. This approach within material culture–focused folklore studies and ethnology is paralleled by, and shares some features with, *chaîne opératoire* methods within archaeology and, increasingly, social and cultural anthropology (assessed in an ethnographic context by Coupaye 2009). It also parallels broader interests in material culture studies in object biographies and in the social life of things more broadly (Hoskins 2006).

Basketry among the Baiku Yao

The Baiku Yao are one of many branches of the larger Yao nationality, one of China's fifty-six officially recognized nationalities or ethnic groups (Harrell 2001; Mullaney 2010). The majority of Yao people live in the borderlands of Southwest China and Northern Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand (Litzinger 2000; Pourret 2002). In Mandarin Chinese, *Baiku* literally means white trousers, and the Baiku Yao people are thus named for the white knickerbocker-style pants worn by Baiku Yao men, both historically and today. The Baiku Yao population is comprised of about forty-five thousand individuals, with the majority living in Nandan County in Guangxi (in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township and Baxu Yao Ethnic Township) and Libo County in Guizhou (in Yaoshan Yao Ethnic Township). The Baiku Yao townships are thus located in northwest Guangxi and an adjacent part of southern Guizhou. The Baiku Yao community where we, and our project collaborators, have undertaken ethnographic work is Huaili village within Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Huaili is an administrative

village, which also includes several additional nearby natural villages. This village cluster is home to the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum, one of the institutional partners for our work there (Gong 2016; Mo 2015; Nitzky 2012, 2014, 2020; Zhang 2018). The Baiku Yao endonym is Dounou, and the language of the community is a dialect of Bunu (Bu-Nao), within the Hmongic branch of the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) language family (Ethnologue 2020a). The most complete ethnographic account of the Baiku Yao in English can be found in William Nitzky's dissertation (2014). Key work by Chinese scholars include studies by Liao (2006) and Yu (1987, 1989). The Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum staff, who are themselves Baiku Yao, have an active program of documentary work focusing on ethnographic video. Especially relevant to this project is Lu Chaoming's 2014 film *Zhu Yi* (Bamboo Arts), which documents the making of a distinctive type of bamboo basket and a bamboo musical instrument (Lu 2014; cf. Kay 2018, 2019).

Figure 1. Huatu, one of the Baiku Yao natural villages associated with Hauili administrative village, in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. The persistence of an older Baiku Yao vernacular house type and granary type in Huaqiao, Huatu, and Manjiang villages led to the placement of the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum here (Nitzky 2014, 109–10). Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, December 14, 2017.

Figure 2. Agricultural fields in the territory of Hauili within Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Jon Kay, December 16, 2017.

Hauili and its affiliated villages are located in mountainous territory (figures 1–2). Suitable soil and water are in short supply, and residents often walk considerable distances to their agricultural fields. In recent years, the county government has been investing in the development of environmental and cultural heritage tourism activities, drawing on local Baiku Yao and Zhuang culture as a major resource. However, so far, the community has only received a relatively small number of tourists, even though the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum was founded there in 2004 and other heritage tourism institutions, including a Baiku Yao-themed resort, have been established (Bu 2019; *China Daily* 2016; Nitzky 2014).

It is in this context that we have studied the status of Baiku Yao basket making, sale, and use. In the remainder of this section, we will recount the place of baskets in farming, household life, textile production, and ritual. Beyond issues of use, we will also address the making and marketing of such baskets in the Baiku Yao communities centered in and around Lihu township. Featuring three community members with whom we consulted in greater depth, this section of the article will evoke some of the personal and community knowledge that the research team has learned from basket users, makers, and sellers.

While in many other parts of China and the world hand-made baskets have passed out of daily use and been transformed into heritage objects, Baiku Yao people are still living and working with many kinds of hand-made bamboo baskets (Jackson and Zhang 2019). However, in Huaili (natural) village there is only one fulltime basket maker. On our first day visiting local people, our Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum colleagues introduced us to this basket maker, Li Guicai. Mr. Li is in his sixties and lives with his wife, his son, and his daughter-in-law. His father passed away when he was only forty-five days old, and his mother brought him up alone. He learned making baskets by observing other basket makers when he was a teenager, with the goal of financially helping his family (figure 3).

Mr. Li started with making carrying baskets and sold them—at that time—for 4 RMB (US$0.60 in present day US dollars) a pair. He then learned to make the baskets

Figure 3. Basket maker Li Guicai photographed during the weekly market in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Jon Kay, December 16, 2017.

that are used by Baiku Yao textile makers to press pleats into new skirts (figure 4). Even after he could make baskets in simpler forms, it still took him three to four years of practice to fully master the skill of making the rice baskets (*zhufanhe*) that are today his signature form (figure 5). Even though making baskets is a source of income for his family, he also makes rice baskets as gifts for relatives and friends who need them for ritual purposes. In Baiku Yao funerals, people hang this type of rice basket, containing sticky (glutinous) rice, on the top of a bamboo pole and place these

Figure 4. Textile artist He Jinxiu begins unwrapping a new skirt in Baiku Yao style from a pleating basket. While not made by Li Guicai, Ms. He's basket is of a type that Mr. Li learned to make early in his basket-making career. Photograph by C. Kurt Dewhurst, December 17, 2017.

Figure 5. A new rice basket in Baiku Yao style made by Li Guicai on December 14–15, 2017. The basket pictured is the focus of a documentary video by Jon Kay (2019) and of figures 6–7. 27 x 27 x 22.5 cm. IUMAA accession number 2017-11-0001. Photograph courtesy of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections.

in front of tombs. Rice baskets are also used to carry sticky rice and other culturally important foods as a gift sent between the households of a groom and bride. In everyday contexts, they can be used as a kind of lunchbox for someone spending the day in their fields. In addition to providing a source of financial support for his family, making such baskets is a way for Mr. Li to connect to community members and maintain relationships with them.

Mr. Li used to work as a migrant worker, cutting sugarcane for people who live on the lower, more fertile lands in the region. He used to only make baskets during the non-farming seasons, but eight years earlier he started to be a full-time basket maker, because health challenges prevented him from being a migrant worker or doing farm work at home. Although Mr. Li is capable of making different kinds of baskets, he now focuses on the complex and locally valued rice baskets. Compared to other kinds of baskets in local use, these rice baskets are in high demand in the local Baiku Yao market, as they cannot be imported from other places. This reflects a wider trend within the region in which widely used types are often made by specialist villages outside a locality and imported, while highly valued, locally specific types continue to be produced locally, for local use. Baskets used in ritualized gift exchange, special ceremonies, and festivals are often candidates for such local production.

As we learned over two days spent with Mr. Li, this rice storage basket is not a simple type. As a culturally important basket, the type that Mr. Li makes has an elaborate form. It is double woven, meaning that the basket itself is comprised of two layers, with the smooth, shiny, durable outer face of the bamboo splints facing both outward on the outer layer and inward on the inner layer. It consists of a simpler, more everyday cube-shaped basket, comprising a deeper bottom section and a shallower lid. The added base is practical, because it holds the basket off the ground, which is important as they are often used in muddy farm environments, but the special base and wrapper is also highly decorative.[4]

On our first day with him, Mr. Li started his basket and carried it through to the completion of the base and matching double-woven lid (figure 6). With his bamboo already on hand, this effort took a very full workday in which he only took one extremely quick stretch break, rising from the low stool on which he worked. On our second day watching, photographing, and videorecording him, Mr. Li continued his work, completing the basket's decorative-but-functional base, wrapper, and handles over the course of the morning (figure 7). The basket that Mr. Li allowed us to watch him produce from start to finish was purchased for the collections of the former Mathers Museum of World Cultures for 200 RMB (US$30). That basket is now a part of the collections of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. An additional basket of this type by Mr. Li was collected for the Michigan State University Museum. A documentary video showing Mr. Li's work in making the basket discussed here has been produced by research team member Jon Kay (2019). Reducing a day and a half of work (and video footage) to fifteen minutes, that film provides rich evidence of how Baiku Yao bamboo basket making works, including the tools and processes used.

As a full-time basket maker, Mr. Li can make five to six rice baskets per month. He sells them to fellow villagers or takes them to the Lihu township market on market

Figure 6. Moments from about ten hours of basket weaving by Li Guicai on December 14, 2017. During his first day working on the rice basket, he completed the double-woven basket and lid, resulting in a cube-shaped basket that is sometimes used in this simpler form.
Photographs by Jason Baird Jackson and Lijun Zhang.

Figure 7. Moments from day two of basket weaving by Li Guicai on December 15, 2017. These images evoke the making of the base, wrapper, and double bail handles for the Baiku Yao–style rice basket.
Photographs by Jason Baird Jackson.

days to sell. Tourists would only very occasionally buy such rice baskets. By the time of our visit in December 2017, Mr. Li had only ever sold four or five baskets to non-local tourists across his whole career of basket making. His discussion and demonstration with our team was his first documentary experience related to his work, and he has not previously participated in any cultural heritage initiatives related to his basketry.

Our days spent with Mr. Li were followed by a hike—along with many of the region's village residents—to Lihu Yao Ethnic Township for its periodic market day. There we met the market's primary Baiku Yao basket merchant, a younger Mr. Li named Li Guozhong. Li Guozhong comes from a basket-making family and is himself a welder and an innovative maker of looms and other weaving tools, but as relates to our topic he is a buyer of wholesale bamboo work baskets and a retail seller of the same to his Zhuang and Yao neighbors from the villages around Lihu (figure 8). He invented a metal version of the otherwise wooden Yao loom—a sign that he is not opposed to technical innovations—but he was clear and practical in response to our queries about the rise of imitation (skeuomorph) baskets of molded plastic (figure 9). He acknowledged that such industrial goods are usually cheaper but noted that price is not the end of it. He observed that his customers prefer to pay a bit more for bamboo baskets because they hold up better over time when the inexpensive plastic ones do not. Much work with baskets in rural Southwest China takes place outdoors. Under such conditions, plastic quickly becomes brittle and breaks, while bamboo is more durable. His customers come to him not out of a vague loyalty to the old way,

Figure 8. Baiku Yao basket merchant Li Guozhong consults with a potential customer in his stall at the Lihu Yao Ethnic Township marketplace. Photograph by Jon Kay, December 16, 2017.

Figure 9. Molded plastic trays and sifters that imitate widespread Chinese basketry forms being sold on market day in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Carrie Hertz, December 16, 2017.

Figure 10. Potential customers visit Li Guozhong's basketry stall at the Lihu Yao Ethnic Township market. Photograph by Jon Kay, December 16, 2017.

but because his baskets last longer than the plastic imitations that can be found elsewhere in the Lihu market.

Our team documented fifteen basket forms for sale in his market stall, purchasing fifteen baskets across fourteen of the fifteen types (figure 10).[5] While some of his baskets came from local sources, most were obtained from wholesalers across the provincial border in more remote parts of Guizhou. As we learned during our later trip to Liping County in the summer of 2019, there are a large number of full-time basket makers who produce baskets in neighboring Guizhou. There, certain villages are known for specializing in making particular basket forms. Mr. Li's business gathering baskets on a regional basis and selling them to his Lihu township neighbors connects them within a larger regional basketry trade network.

Of the fifteen basket types that Mr. Li had on offer in December 2017, some are widely used and easily found across the entire region. Of this sort are low trays (*zhubian*) that are used in a wide range of applications, from drying produce and

Figure 11. A backpack basket in the style preferred by the Baiku Yao in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Purchased from Li Guozhong on December 16, 2017. 75.5 x 55.5 x 48 cm. IUMAA accession number 2017-11-0015. Photograph courtesy of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections.

Figure 12. A brazier or coal-carrying basket of a type used among the Baiku Yao in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Fashioned of bamboo, the bucket-shaped basket holds a pottery vessel, making it suitable for carrying hot coals or warming a space with them. Purchased from Li Guozhong on December 16, 2019. 41 x 25 x 24.5 cm. IUMAA Accession number 2017-11-0017. Photograph courtesy of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections.

Figure 13. Textile artist He Jinxiu displays an indigo dyed and embroidered blouse panel outside her home in Huaili village. Photograph by C. Kurt Dewhurst, December 17, 2017.

fanning grain to displaying retail goods within shops. Others are more localized, such as the distinctive form of backpack basket (*beilou*) preferred by the Baiku Yao and a local type of handled coal brazier basket (*huolong*) that contains a ceramic bowl for use in carrying, and keeping warm with, hot coals (figures 11–12).

In addition to considering the making and circulation of baskets, inventorying baskets within households and using such inventories for related interviews in which we discussed each of the baskets identified in the household surveys helped us gain a better understanding of the basket forms gathered and curated by Baiku Yao families and the ways that they are used within the life of the Baiku Yao community. As an instance from this part of our investigation, we focus here on the baskets found in the household of He Jinxiu. Ms. He is a highly regarded textile artist in her fifties. She is the chair of the Huaili Village Women's Federation (*fulian*) and is actively involved in the village leadership work. She was also a key collaborator in the work of our larger research group, part of whom focused attention not on basketry but on fabric arts such as indigo dyeing, embroidery, weaving, and the making of clothing and other textile works. Ms. He is an expert in all of these disciplines (figure 13).

Ms. He lives with her husband and her five-year-old granddaughter in a two-story home in Huaili. We documented sixty-seven baskets in her household. There are baskets for carrying crops from the field, for hauling vegetables back from the garden, for drying the harvested crops, and for storing them. There are also baskets

Figure 14. A cotton harvesting basket found in the kitchen of Ms. He's home. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, December 17, 2017.

Figure 15. A tobacco-carrying basket found in Ms. He's storage shed. Photograph by C. Kurt Dewhurst, December 17, 2017.

for holding weavers' shuttles and for covering pots of indigo dye. In general, Ms. He's baskets can be categorized into farming baskets, baskets for daily household use, baskets associated with textile arts, and ritual baskets.

On the refrigerator in Ms. He's living room hung the kind of iconic Baiku Yao rice basket that the older Mr. Li makes. Now such rice baskets are less commonly used for taking food to the rice field, especially among the younger generation, as motorcycles have made commutes to the rice fields faster and more convenient. Particularly valued by, and essential to, Ms. He in her work is a basket in the shape of a conical tube used for pressing pleats into skirts. Ms. He proudly said that the basket was made by her husband in the year that her thirty-three-year-old daughter was born. Now not many people have this kind of basket in the village, and many neighbors come to borrow it from her. This skirt-pleating basket is one of the types that the older Mr. Li—Ms. He's neighbor—learned to fashion at the start of his basketry career (figure 4).

Among the baskets that Ms. He has stored in her kitchen is a round basket that we picture in figure 14. Ms. He attaches the ropes through the basket and hangs it on her waist when she picks cotton during August and September (lunar calendar). When we visited her in December 2017, she explained that she had not grown cotton that year as she was too busy with village leadership tasks relating to local work on an ongoing poverty alleviation campaign.

In the storage shed in front of Ms. He's house, we found a very big tobacco basket. Ms. He's family put tobacco leaves in this basket and walked thirty-five minutes to carry them from the tobacco field to the tobacco flue-curing house. The villagers around Huaili have been encouraged to grow agricultural cash crops such as tobacco and chestnuts so as to generate additional income for their families (figure 15).

In the same storage shed, we also saw a big drying basket (figure 16). Among the Baiku Yao, such a basket can be used on rainy days. People put charcoal under the basket to continue the drying of rice and cotton harvested from the field. Ms. He noted that the basket was made by her husband's grandfather, and that it has been

within her family for more than half a century. Although her family no longer use it for this original function, they still want to keep it as long as they can.

A kitchen made of rammed earth at the back of her brick house is where Ms. He cooks food and produces indigo dye. It is also a private, sacred space with religious items in basket form. Because of their deep cultural importance and the traditional beliefs associated with them, it is a taboo to touch some of the indigo dye and ritual baskets curated and used in this core space of the household. Three round-shaped baskets attached to the wall of the kitchen are ritual baskets that represent her godchildren. The two on the left are for her two godsons and the one on the right is for her goddaughter.[6] The baskets were sent to her from her godchildren's families, and a bowl of water is placed in the baskets in accord with Baiku Yao custom. A basket in the shape of a bowl that is hung on the kitchen wall is also for ritual purposes. If a family's livestock animal is sick and has to be killed, the family must get such a basket and place it on the kitchen wall before killing the animal. At a corner of the kitchen is an item that looks like a small rake or harrow. It is another form of ritual bamboo object. It is for blessing Ms. He's granddaughter's health and safety. It is used on children from the age of three months to five years and must be made by the child's uncles on the mother's side. The important lesson that Ms. He graciously shared with us in allowing us to see and learn a bit about such bamboo basketry objects is that while baskets are crucial to the practical everyday lives of working people—helping them undertake a myriad of types of labor—they are also crucial to the spiritual lives of the Baiku Yao people. This is a point that can be observed through close study of ethnographic works from the region (for example Formoso 2013, 88–89; Mueggler 2001, passim) but that has not, to our knowledge, been stated directly in the English -language literature.

The vast majority of the baskets in Ms. He's household are made of bamboo; but, as in other parts of the world, industrially manufactured basket surrogates from materials such as plastic have—despite the younger Mr. Li's sound observations on the topic—appeared in Baiku Yao people's households. In figure 17 is shown two of the five plastic "baskets" found in Ms. He's home. These are the only two plastic

Figure 16. A crop-drying basket kept in Ms. He's storage shed. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, December 17, 2017.

Figure 17. Large and small plastic "baskets" used by Ms. He and her granddaughter for gathering chestnuts, chilis, and other produce. Photograph by Lijun Zhang, December 17, 2017.

Figure 18. Baskets in use among the Baiku Yao in Nandan County. Clockwise: marketing pigs, marketing vegetables, a basketry corral, using a backpack basket as a support while preparing a loom, and marketing indigo. Photographs by Carrie Hertz, Jon Kay, and Jason Baird Jackson, December 16–17, 2017.

examples used outdoors. She bought them in the Lihu township market and uses them to pick chestnuts with her granddaughter.

From these three knowledgeable consultants—Ms. He, Mr. Li, and Mr. Li—and from others with whom we spoke in Huali and Manjiang villages and in Lihu township, we learned of the vital importance of baskets in the daily life of the Baiku Yao people (figure 18). In addition to the forms, styles, and functions of baskets, we also learned some of the stories behind the baskets and how these people connect to their family, community, and the local ecological environment through baskets while confronting

Figure 19. The streets of Tongle Miao Ethnic Township are crowded with vendors, shoppers, and other participants during the Dong Respect the Water Buffalo Festival. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, May 13, 2016.

often hard economic realities with sometimes difficult, but very knowledge-dependent, labor. This observation also holds for the Dong people of Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, to whom we turn next, but there are also differences between the two communities that a comparison can help reveal.

Basketry among the Southern Dong of Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County

Known officially within the enumeration of recognized Chinese nationalities as Dong, the people so named refer to themselves with the endonym Kam (Geary et al. 2003, 3). The Dong people residing in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, in northern Guangxi, speak one of two varieties of the southern dialect of Kam (Geary et al. 2003, 33–35). The Kam (Dong) language is part of the Kam-Sui language family, which is itself a part of the larger Kam-Tai family (Ethnologue 2020b). While we have pursued studies of basketry in Dong villages in neighboring Congjiang and Liping Counties in Guizhou, we limit our account here to our experiences and to the situation in Sanjiang. There we interviewed and collected baskets from basket merchants in the county seat and undertook more focused research in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township and one of its associated natural villages, Zhaicong. It is important to note that the southern Dong and the Dong people as a whole (northern and southern, combined) constitute a much larger and more geographically expansive population than do the Baiku Yao. The overall Dong population is estimated to be 2.88 million individuals spread across Guizhou, Hunan, Guangxi, and Hubei (National Bureau of Statistics 2010). The overall population of Tongle Miao Ethnic Township was reported to be 47,102 in 2020. The township's breakdown by nationality, as reflected in county government data, is reported as: 46.7 percent Dong, 46.7 percent Miao, 6 percent Yao, 0.5 percent Han, and 0.02 percent Zhuang (Wu Lianghuan, pers. comm., 2021; Geary et al. 2003, 27–29).[7]

In Chinese administrative nomenclature, townships are rural towns that are administrative centers inclusive of outlying villages. Ethnic townships, such as Lihu Yao Ethnic Township in Nandan County, are ones associated with a predominant local nationality. Like Lihu, Tongle is an ethnic township. As its name suggests, it is associated with the area's Miao people, but as a town itself, Tongle is a hub for Dong cultural life (figure 19). General and village-specific ethnographies of the Dong that

are applicable to the Dong situation in Sanjiang include works by Candice Cornet (2009), D. Norman Geary and his collaborators (2003), Catherine Ingram (2011) and Jiaping Wu (Ingram and Wu 2017), Fang Changgan (2019), Li Yajuan and her collaborators (Li, Turner, and Cui 2015; Li et al. 2020), Ou Chaoquan (2007), Ruan Xing (1996, 2007), Shi Kaizhong (2007), and Suvi Rautio (2019).

In evoking basketry in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County in the north of Guangxi, we can begin with a creator, Mr. Qin Fuyuying, a Dong basket maker in Zhaicong village, which is now virtually adjacent to the town of Tongle on its north side (figures 20–21). Like other area makers, he uses a preferred local species of green bamboo that he is able to gather himself from nearby hillsides.[8] In a pattern already observed among the Baiku Yao and discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the Dong people of Sanjiang use baskets that are alternatively made locally by craftspeople like Mr. Qin or by specialists working elsewhere in the region. For reasons related to variable economic conditions in the Guizhou-Guangxi borderlands, the most common work basket types used in Sanjiang county are imported from more remote basket-making communities across the mountains and the provincial border in Guizhou.

In the Guangxi communities where we have worked, locally made baskets exist in response to more specialized and less widespread needs. As was noted earlier in connection with the basket type that is Mr. Li's specialty, this is a pattern that we have found across Southwest China. If the full basketry repertoire is not made locally, then those baskets that *are* still made locally will often be marked as of special interest to local people and will figure in more specifically localized work practices or in local rituals. Mr. Qin makes bamboo work baskets in this regional and local context. His signature form is a locally valued basket worn at the waist by wading fishermen who use it as a creel (figures 21–22). This form is a variant of another local type used for

Figure 20. Tongle viewed across the rice paddies from Qin Fuyuying's home in Zhaicong village. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson July 18, 2018.

Figure 21. At his home in Zhaicong village in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township, basket maker Qin Fuyuying is pictured at work on a fish creel basket of a type used among the Dong people of Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, July 18, 2018.

Figure 22. A Dong man in a basketry hat uses a cast net and a basketry creel to fish on the Miao River in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, July 19, 2018.

Figure 23. Qin Fuyuying's granddaughter Qin Yuntao works as a Kam-Mandarin translator during Lijun Zhang's interview with him, focused on his history as a basket maker and on the use of baskets in his household. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, July 19, 2018.

the harvesting of tea. Tea is now a key local cash crop that is grown widely by farmers in the Tongle area.

In his sixties, Mr. Qin has been making baskets for more than forty years. When he was a teenager, he worked at a small hydroelectric station near his village. There he met a basket maker who taught him the craft, and Mr. Qin is now generally regarded as one of the best basket makers in his village. We were pleased that our partners at the Sanjiang Dong Ecomuseum arranged for us to meet him and his family in July 2018. They hosted us for an interview (figure 23), allowed us to video document his basket making, and sold us examples of his work for the museum collection that we have been developing as a part of our basketry research. In addition, like Ms. He in Hauli, Mr. Qin and his family very generously permitted us to undertake a basketry inventory within their home.

Figure 24. Su Chengchang (right) and his Guiyue Baskets and Wood Crafts shop in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township. Photograph by C. Kurt Dewhurst, July 17, 2018.

Figure 25. Basket shop owner Su Chengchang at his shop in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, July 19, 2018.

Mr. Qin might make a bundle of baskets and offer them directly to buyers on a market day, but he regularly sells his wares to another of our interlocutors, Mr. Su Chengchang, the proprietor of Guiyue Baskets and Wood Crafts Store—the most prominent and impressive basketry shop in Tongle township (figures 24–25). As we noted earlier, retailers gather baskets from a wide region. This is because scores of different basket types are used locally, but today many fewer are made locally. With Mr. Su's help, we visited one of his source communities in Liping County, Guizhou during 2019. We thus now know a bit about the kinds of places where Mr. Su obtains his stock. These are Dong villages specializing in basketry production. Such villages supply a wide multiethnic region in the mountains of Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan.

When we documented his shop inventory in July of 2018, Mr. Su had forty-one different kinds of baskets on offer. Some are near-ubiquitous types used daily by rural people throughout the region. Examples of such commonplace baskets include scoops, trays, and colanders of various sizes. Iconic of the Dong farmer is the boot-shaped billhook carrier (figure 26).[9] In Mr. Su's shop, there are also basket types that he reports to be on the verge of obsolescence. For the museum collections that we have been building, for instance, we purchased a pair of peddler's baskets to be carried from remote village to remote village on a shoulder pole by a traveling salesperson offering small goods such as needles and candy (Ou 2007, 78) (figure 27). In our study region, such baskets are more likely to serve today as decorations in tourist-facing retail establishments. The general trend is one in which baskets in many forms remain essential to the work of rural life, but the incredible variety found in the past is diminishing in tandem with general processes of social and cultural change, including the development of new transportation infrastructures and the adoption of new household, farming, and industrial technologies.

Mr. Su was a cosmetic product salesman in Guizhou before he started his basketry selling career. He came back to his hometown to open the store that has enabled him to stay with his family while making a living by selling baskets. He has been a generous supporter of our studies and a proud participant in our museum collecting. In addition to discussing the origins and uses of each basketry type in his shop, Mr. Su helped us make a representative selection of baskets for the museum collection that we have assembled. Over two trips to Tongle, we have obtained fifteen baskets from his shop and fourteen from other sellers in the county, including Mr. Qin. These are in addition to fourteen Dong baskets that we have collected in Liping or Congjiang counties in Guizhou.[10]

Figure 26. Billhook carrier baskets hang on display at the Guiyue Baskets and Wood Crafts shop in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township. Photograph by Jason Baird Jackson, May 13, 2016.

Figure 27. Comprising a set, a pair of peddler's baskets with a carrying pole and rope purchased in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township from Su Chengchang on July 17 and 19, 2018. Small, square openings at the base of the baskets can accommodate ropes used in creating a system for suspending the baskets from a shoulder pole. The pole pictured here is equipped with a pair of upright dowels near each end. These keep baskets suspended by rope harnesses in place on the pole. IUMAA accession numbers and measurements are: left basket 2018-07-10 (34 x 28 x 25.5 cm), right basket 2018-07-11 (34 x 28.5 x 25.5 cm), shoulder pole 2018-07-20 (121 x 5. X 3 cm), and rope 2018-07-21 (73.5 x 5 x 4 cm [bundled]). Photographs courtesy of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections.

Outside of large towns like the Sanjiang county seat of Guyi, the main competition for a shop owner like Mr. Su is not other basketry shops but pop-up sales that occur during regular market days. His customers benefit from his large, diverse stock and regular hours, but bargain hunters in a position to wait can try to meet their needs during these festive occasions. For makers, pop-up sales during festival markets enable them to trade wholesale for retail pricing. We saw this dynamic in May 2016, when we visited Tongle when the Dong Respect the Water Buffalo Festival (*Jingniujie*) was then underway (figure 19).[11]

Because of the nature of our fieldwork trips, our insights into basketry in use are weighted toward women's household experiences. Throughout Southwest China, we have seen baskets at use in construction, industry, and agriculture, but our deepest knowledge comes from in-home craft work and domestic labor. Examples of such Dong basketry uses include baskets for the in-kitchen storage of oil tea, for use as cradles, and to hold craft materials and tools. In Guangxi, we have undertaken three household basketry censuses. Ms. He hosted us for one of two such inventories among the Baiku Yao. Among the Dong, Mr. Qin's family was kind in allowing us to wander their home in search of baskets. In his family collection, we documented 109 baskets representing many forms. We note that very few of Mr. Qin's own baskets are in this count. While generalist basket makers exist in this region, most makers become proficient and efficient with just a few forms. Mr. Qin's family thus owns many baskets made by other makers over the course of many years. The stories behind some are remembered in great detail, while others remain utilitarian commodity tools en route, in time, to the trash heap.

As among the Baiku Yao, with the rice basket type that is Mr. Li's specialty, the Dong people of the Tongle area also give special attention to baskets used in ritual exchanges. In Sanjiang, round, wok-shaped baskets are used, carried from giver to recipient with a shoulder pole (figure 28). The ceremonial occasions for such food-

Figure 28. A wok-shaped basket of the type used for gift exchange among the Dong people in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County. Purchased in Tongle Miao Ethnic Township from Su Chengchang on July 19, 2018. IUMAA accession number 2018-07-0023, 39.5 x 37 x 23 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collections.

gift exchange are multiple, but the easiest example to narrate here surrounds engagement and marriage, with (future) co-parents-in-law signaling mutual respect for each other and binding their families together through the exchange of such basket-born gifts, particularly of special foods. Such matrimonial exchanges are not a one-time affair. As discussed in the general ethnographic works about the Dong, different kinds of goods are exchanged at different stages in a protracted period extending from pre-engagement all the way up to the arrival of a first child (Geary et al. 2003, 81–82; Ou 2007, 151–52). While we do not possess an in-process photograph of such an exchange underway, we can point interested readers to a paper on Kam rice in which steamed glutinous rice and rice wine is being carried in baskets with a shoulder pole to a family celebrating the one-month mark in the life of a new baby (Wang et al. 2018, 19; see also Su 2016).

Baiku Yao and southern Dong practice in this regard represents a localized instance of a broader set of basket-enhanced exchange practices in multicultural China (Knapp 2011, 100–101) (figure 29). Baskets for gift exchange is an example of the broader and deeper phenomenon of ritual and spiritual basket use that we have only begun to learn about in our fieldwork but that has been touched upon in the English-language ethnography, as noted earlier in the Baiku Yao context. It should not be surprising that throughout the Southwest, our consultants have had an easier time evoking for us basket-centered exchange practices on the human social plane. The place of baskets and basketry-woven objects in exchanges between living people and ancestors and other spiritual beings is exactly the kind of topic that is least suitable for survey research undertaken by large groups across multiple forms of linguistic and cultural difference. The available ethnography does make clear though that the Dong also include baskets and basketry-woven objects within their ritual and spiritual practices (see for example Rautio 2019, 188–91).

Comparison

While it often falls short in providing granular social and cultural detail, including the affective textures of local life, survey and controlled comparative research helps draw

Figure 29. A Han-style "wedding basket" collected by Berthold Lauffer near Shanghai for the American Museum of Natural History in 1901. Accession number 70/4638 A-D. It can be compared to preferred Baiku Yao type in figure 5 and the Dong type in figure 28. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.

attention to basic similarities and differences between populations within a region (Eggan 1954; Fischer 1968; Urban 1999). When showing photographs of the baskets that we have collected among the Bai and Baiku Yao, for instance, Dong people are always quick to observe that they do not use backpack baskets, a basic type that is used extensively not only among the Bai and Yao but throughout the Southwest. They stress their own use of shoulder poles instead. Today such differences are sometimes highly self-conscious, taking the form of ethnic boundary markers, much like the more famous and oft-discussed differences in dress practices within this region. Some differences of this type seemingly go unnoticed. Despite its practicality, we have only seen basketry billhook carriers (*liandaolou*) being made, sold, and used among the Dong and some neighboring Miao groups, despite the fact that the billhook is an essential tool used extensively across Southwest China (and beyond). No one ever commented on this difference to us, although individuals outside the Dong area puzzled over the boot-shaped baskets in our collection photographs. Commonalities and differences in basketry repertories, techniques, and uses represent a line of evidence for understanding regional cultural histories and processes of cultural convergence and differentiation.

Such ethnological dynamics greatly interest us, but the manifest focus of our comparative work has centered on understanding commonalities and differences related to the impacts of the Chinese state's extraordinarily active national intangible cultural heritage policies on local life among the minority nationalities of the Southwest, particularly with respect to textile crafts, including basketry. As museum activities are one key vector for such heritage work, including the establishment of ecomuseums, such as those found in Sanjiang and Nandan and other local museums working at the nexus of cultural heritage tourism and cultural preservation activities, it seemed logical for our museums-based and museums-focused team to inquire at this intersection of processes and factors.

We have seen early indicators of change among the Bai in Yunnan, but in northern Guangxi baskets are—for the most part—not seen as heritage objects, and basket makers are not understood as candidates for intangible cultural heritage master (*feiyi chuanchengren*) status. Thus, basketry provides us with a strong contrast to our team's work with celebrated fabric artists. The work on basketry that we have reported on here is intentionally set, as we have suggested, in relation to parallel work that other members of our binational, multiethnic team have been doing with Bai, Dong, and Yao fabric craftspeople. A full comparison awaits the completion of work by both groups, but we can briefly here evoke what our colleagues have been doing and touch

provisionally on some key differences separating these two very different sets of textile crafts.

Among both the Baiku Yao in Nandan County and the Dong people in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, our colleagues have learned about local practices of loom weaving, indigo dyeing, design pattern making, and the making of the local clothing styles that, as (localized) national dress, are so iconic of social identities in this region (An 2011; Bourzat 2016; Formoso 2013; Harrell 2009). Among the Baiku Yao, they have also learned about a remarkable type of non-woven silk used in decorating women's clothing (similar to that described for the Miao by Corrigan 2001, 18). In nearly all instances, their interlocutors have been celebrated women—such as He Jinxiu—whose expertise and artistry have come to be recognized through the layered intangible cultural heritage (ICH) system that now centers so much cultural and economic development work in rural ethnic China (Chen 2010; Kong and Song 2018; Zhang and You 2019, 15–16). They are designated as masters at the city/county, prefectural, provincial, and national level, and this fact has profoundly reorganized their work and the lives of their households. The impacts extend beyond the individual and her household. They increasingly permeate local communities, and they are increasingly visible in such domains as education, cultural tourism, museum work, ethnic representation and self-representation, local economic reorganization, and differential out and return migration from and back to rural areas.

While women sometimes make bamboo baskets in Guangxi and elsewhere in Southwest China, and they definitely use baskets in countless ways, the makers and sellers we have engaged are almost all men. Thus, for instance, basket making and selling is today mainly men's work, and it mainly falls outside the realm of ICH intervention. Embroidery, by contrast, is women's work, and it is eligible for, and particularly celebrated within, Chinese heritage interventions. As was true during the Republican period as studied by Fei Xiaotong and Zhang Zhiyi (Fei and Chang 1945, 173–76) in rural Yunnan, basket making today is either a source of supplemental income for farmers or a poverty- or near poverty-marked profession. For any North American accustomed to the market for heritage basketry in Native North America, the low prices at which baskets assembled with great skill sell in Southwest China is an unshakable shock, but local people there do not give these dynamics much thought. Baskets are ubiquitous and are largely unremarked upon commodity goods, despite their diverse and engaging forms and the deep knowledge that underpins their making. At present, in those parts of northern Guangxi that we have visited at least, they are mainly *habitus* rather than heritage (figure 30) (Jackson, Müske, and Zhang 2020). With the exception of particularly meaningful heirlooms, such as those that we noted in discussing Ms. He's collection, they are generally used until they are broken, and then they are tossed away and replaced. When they are preserved as heirlooms, it is usually because they are of an increasingly rare type or because they were made by, and associated with, a specific ancestor.

We aspire to say more about this in our future work, but there are some signs of change in terms of basketry. Even as they are still central to everyday rural life, baskets also now appear in museums, hotels, and retail settings, where they are deployed to give tourists and other visitors a sense of rural authenticity. While we

Figure 30. A Baiku Yao woman using a backpack basket to transport corn stalks near Huaili village in Lihu Yao Ethnic Township. Photograph by C. Kurt Dewhurst, December 17, 2017.

Figure 31. In the Dong town of Zhaoxing in Liping County, Guizhou and in other locations in Southwest China that are heavily visited by tourists, parents can purchase baskets such as these for their children to wear. Adapted from a common practical basket type often used for planting seeds and harvesting smaller crops such as chili peppers, these baskets have become small backpacks decorated with colorful patches and beads. Dangling bells help parents keep tabs on their tiny tourists. Photograph by Lijun Zhang, July 7, 2019.

have not yet found an official basketry master among the Yao or Dong, we have interviewed a remarkable Bai basket maker near the tourist hub of Dali who has received the lowest level of ICH master designation. This development has augmented his family's income in one modest way—he now occasionally receives guests from a local hotel who come for simple basket-making classes. Similarly, some Chinese scholars working elsewhere in China have also begun tracking a modest expansion of ICH discourse and engagement into the world of rural work basketry (Fan 2017; Xu and Xu 2020; Xu, Xu, and Wang 2020).

In tourism-prone locales in the region, we have also observed the rise of adapted basketry forms aimed at travelers seeking souvenirs (cf. Luo, Ahmed, and Long 2020). Such tourist baskets often take common work basket forms and layer on value-added decorations to enable makers and sellers to obtain higher per-item profits for the amount of labor invested in manufacture (figure 31). The use of baskets as heritage-inflected decorations and the rise of baskets as tourist souvenirs in heritage-tourism zones points to ways that the basket industry is being reshaped by broader heritage endeavors, even if this is not yet happening widely in terms of formally recognized, trained, and financially supported masters (ICH inheritors) who are called upon to train apprentices and to participate more broadly in the state's elaborate cultural heritage system.

In this article we have offered just a brief introduction to some of the people whom we have met, and it is only an evocation of some of what we have learned in our basket studies in Southwest China. We hope that international circumstances—both public health and geopolitical—will enable us to return to the region and resume again the studies on which we have reported here.

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Notes

1. This article derives from a larger program of research considering basketry—and textile practices more broadly—in Southwest China. Both reviewers of this manuscript expressed enthusiasm for our work and sought, respectively, additional details on basketmaking and basket use (one reviewer) and on the relationship of basketry to tourism, community memory, and meaning-making (another reviewer). We share these reviewers' interests in all of these matters, and we hope that our broader studies and future writings, which include a hoped-for monograph now being authored by Zhang and Jackson, will provide space to explore these topics more fully outside the constraints of a single article and our narrower focus here on two communities in Guangxi.

2. The collections and staff of the Mathers Museum of World Cultures were made a part of a new university museum, the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, during the fall of 2019. That change concluded the museum's involvement in the project discussed here, but the larger effort is ongoing, with the authors now participating as individual, university-based researchers.

3. We acknowledge, but pass over, the broader debates on how to best characterize this region—geographically, ethnologically, linguistically, and especially social historically. These debates are broader than those surrounding "Zomia," but the Zomia debates are central to, and emblematic of, the wider realm of scholarly exchange (Anderson and Whitmore 2017; Hammond 2011; Jonsson 2014; Scott 2009).

4. A weakness in our work is that we have not been able to join basket makers in the work of harvesting bamboo, and we have not conclusively identified the specific species being used by the makers whom we have interviewed. The most relevant source on this point—published recently and representing an area relatively close to our study region—is by Luo, Ahmed, and Long (2020). While the authors were not themselves able to confirm directly the species used by Mr. Li in his basketry, our research collaborator He Chun reports to us that the main species that he uses is *baizhu* (white bamboo) or *Fargesia semicoriacea* Yi, but that he sometimes also uses *jinzhu* (golden bamboo) or *Phyllostachys parvifolia* C.D.Chu & H.Y.Chou. While we did not confirm with absolute certainty the species used by our basketry consultants in Guangxi, we were impressed by their bamboo knowledge, including such issues as ideal harvest times and locations. In contrast to

basket makers we have met in Yunnan, all of those whom we have met in Guangxi gather their own bamboo rather than relying on bamboo sellers.

5. In addition to fifteen baskets purchased from Mr. Li's market stall, our collections gathered for Indiana University among the Baiku Yao include five additional baskets in three types gathered from the elder Mr. Li and one other maker. Additional baskets were purchased for the Michigan State University Museum.

6. Godchildren, godson, and goddaughter are conventional English translations from Mandarin Chinese (*guoji de xiaohai* "adopted children," *guoji de erzi* "adopted son," and *guoji de nv'er,* "adopted daughter") for an important kind of "voluntary" kinship relationship of the type that was referred to in older ethnological works as "fictive." Christian associations connected with these terms in English are not intended. At issue is an important relationship initiated by the parents of a child or group of children with honorary, reciprocal, spiritual, and ritual dimensions linking the godparent with the child or children.

7. There is also a small Dong population in northern Vietnam (Geary et al. 2003, 28).

8. We have not confirmed the species of bamboo used by Mr. Qin using botany field methods, but he explained to us that his preferred bamboo is *maozhu* (aka *moso*), which in China is widely used to refer to *Phyllostachys edulis* (Carrière) J.Houz., one of the most commonly used bamboo species (POWO 2021).

9. Prominently used and widely sold in every Dong community that we have visited; we hold that the boot-shaped billhook basket is an icon of the Dong farmer, but it is not solely used by Dong people. Zhang has observed such baskets in use among Miao farmers in Longsheng Various Nationalities Autonomous County, which is the next county to the west of Sanjiang in Guangxi. We have not established the current distribution of this form, but it has not been observed in the Bai, Buyi, or Guizhou Miao communities that we have visited. For a study of this basket type from the perspective of design, see Xie (2016).

10. Here we refer to collections made for Indiana University. Additional baskets from these southern Dong locales were added to the collections of the Michigan State University Museum.

11. In briefer English translation, local people called the festival simply the Water Buffalo or Bull Festival (*Niujie*). The festival in question, occurring in Tongle on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month, is cognate with the festival documented by Geary et al. (2003, 189–90, 210) as Water-Buffaloes' Birthday. The festival name points to the holiday's function as an expression of appreciation for the sacrifices made by water buffalo on behalf of people. The kind of market that we evoke here is a general-purpose market in which food, tools, clothing, and other varied goods—both locally and industrially manufactured—are on offer rather than being a more focused art or craft market.

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