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Disseminating the Policy Narrative of ‘Heritage under Threat’ in China

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Short Biographical Note

Christina Maags is Lecturer in Chinese Politics at the Political Science Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Christina’s research interests focus on the politics around cultural heritage in PR China unfolding, for instance, within the Chinese Living Human Treasures System, ICH policy implementation and diffusion processes, ICH tourism, and expert-state cooperation in ICH safeguarding. Most recently, Christina has co-edited a volume on *Chinese Cultural Heritage in the Making: Experiences, Negotiations and Contestations* at Amsterdam University Press and published an article titled “Replicating Elite-Dominance in Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding: The Role of Local Government–Scholar Networks in China” in the *International Journal of Cultural Property* (2016).

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Originating from within the UNESCO, narratives on ‘heritage under threat’ tell the story of how and why intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practices are valuable, why they disappearing and how they can be protected from destruction. Focusing on the PR China, this paper conducts a frame analysis to identify narratives on ‘heritage under threat’ as employed by the UNESCO, the Chinese party-state and academics. The study argues that while policy narratives in any country undergo a process of congruence-building, circulation, and implementation, these processes take distinctive forms in authoritarian countries due to the states’ discursive and political monopoly: While non-state actors are involved, the state primarily steers the appropriation process. Nevertheless, once established, the policy narrative transforms across time and space, enabling local actors to use it to pursue their own interests.

Keywords: Narratives, policy, intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO, China

Introduction

When the UNESCO¹ adopted its *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICHC) in 2003, it called for the protection of traditional cultural practices worldwide. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) meaning ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith’ (UNESCO 2003a) and its protection were put on the international agenda. Thereafter, international and domestic ICH policies have disseminated narratives on the need to protect ‘threatened’ and ‘disappearing’ traditional culture. The main ‘culprits’ are globalization, modernization and urbanization. Due to rapid socio-economic change and a perceived Westernization

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

of culture worldwide, state and non-state actors have begun mobilizing to protect traditions from extinction, appropriating and transforming these narratives to problematize domestic protection of ICH.

As the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC) demonstrates, policy narratives can have a major impact on pre-existing domestic conceptualizations and practices of traditional culture. Although a lot of traditional Chinese culture had previously been criticized as 'feudal' and 'superstitious', since China's reforms in the 1980s, and particularly since adoption of the ICH Convention in 2004, Chinese cultural traditions have undergone reevaluation. Focusing on congruence-building, circulation and implementation processes, this paper employs the method of frame analysis (Creed, Langstraat, and Scully 2002; Bondes and Heep 2012) to identify policy narratives of 'heritage under threat' as employed by the UNESCO, the Chinese party-state and Chinese academics.

I argue that while policy narratives in any country undergo a process of congruence-building, circulation, and implementation, enabling actors to use the narrative as a political tool, it takes distinctive forms in authoritarian countries. This study demonstrates that due to authoritarian states' discursive and political monopoly, more perhaps than in democratic settings, state actors are able to steer the process in a top-down manner and circulation is more confined to the official verbatim phrasing of the narrative. While the policy narrative can be used to legitimize state as well as non-state activities, it can also undermine its original purpose: protecting cultural heritage. Examining how international ICH policy narratives have been appropriated in China is thus significant to understand they change during appropriation, circulation and implementation processes in an authoritarian political system. Moreover, I propose a

novel methodological approach to structurally compare policy narratives and their evolution over time using frame analysis.

Domestic Appropriation of International Policy Narratives

There is a long academic tradition of studying how discursive and ideational processes influence international and domestic politics. Scholars have studied international discourses (Levitt and Merry 2009) or how the international diffusion and transfer of policies influences domestic politics (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Rogers 2003; Maggetti and Gilardi 2013). International organizations (Stone 2004; Shipan and Volden 2012) and transnational actors, groups and networks (Haas 1992; Mintrom 1997; Balla 2001) play a key facilitating role hereby. Through their promotion, international discourses and inherent narratives enter domestic policy narratives.

The domestic appropriation of foreign policy narratives results in their transformation. Concerning the domestic appropriation of international ideas and norms, many scholars (Acharya 2004; Levitt and Merry 2009) agree that it is necessary to build congruence between the old and the new. According to Levitt and Merry (2009) this congruence-building process is shaped by actors' cognitive maps and cultural categories. In what they call 'vernacularization' of international ideas, 'Vernacularizers take the ideas and practices of one group and present them in terms that another group will accept' (2009, 446). They claim that to understand vernacularization processes, one needs to examine how ideas and norms are appropriated and why, who was involved and what implications this appropriation has (Levitt and Merry 2009, 453). To understand the domestic appropriation of foreign policy narratives it is thus similarly important to examine processes of congruence-building, circulation and implementation.

The PRC, like many other countries, has been strongly influenced by the domestic appropriation of foreign policy narratives. Adopting Marxist-Leninist thought, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attempted to rework popular memory of the past along a narrative of class antagonism. Disseminating this narrative, as Anagnos (1997) notes, ‘represented for the party the process of merging the consciousness of the party with that of “the people”, which legitimated its claim to represent the voice of the masses’ (1997, 32). After commencing reforms in 1978, the party-state continued to rely on narratives to influence its citizens’ perception of the past. Examining museums, Denton (2005), for instance, has demonstrated how historical narratives have changed from promoting a socialist narrative of martyrdom and revolutionary liberation to fostering narratives supporting market reform.

Heritage programs and policies similarly disseminate particular narratives which use the past for present objectives. After joining the World Heritage Convention (WHC) in 1985, the party-state appropriated the notion of ‘authenticity’- a key concept of the WHC - incorporating it in Chinese heritage policies (Zhu 2015) to legitimize domestic heritage conservation (Yan 2015). Yet when appropriating UNESCO discourses, as Yan (2015) argues, the party-state attempts to build congruence by incorporating the Confucian notion of harmony and narratives associated with public health and morality. Appropriating UNESCO policy narratives, however, does not only legitimize domestic heritage conservation. According to Shepherd (2009), the inscription of Tibet heritage sites on the World Heritage List strengthens Chinese political claim over Tibet, thereby ‘transforming these sites into elements in the state narrative of Chinese culture and civilization’ (2009, 250). The Chinese party-state thus uses international organizations such as the UNESCO and its inherent discourses and narratives to legitimize domestic political objectives. As Svensson (2016) notes, ‘The official Chinese heritage discourse

still serves to justify the rule of the Communist Party and its interpretation of history. It is expressed in different policies and laws, and in the selection of protected heritage sites at national, provincial, district and county levels' (Svensson 2016, 37). As in other countries (Bendix, Eggert and Peselmann 2012), elements of UNESCO discourses and narratives are thus incorporated in Chinese policy narratives to foster state objectives.

Local communities, however, commonly engage in bottom-up contestation of these official policy narratives (Maags and Svensson 2018). Local communities have challenged official heritage narratives and practices (Yan 2015; Zhu 2015). Therefore, Zhang and Wu (2016) have argued for the existence of multiple Chinese heritage discourses, which entail different cultural meanings, values and traditions. Besides celebrating local identities and interpretations of the past, NGOs, social networks, intellectuals and journalists at times challenge official heritage policies and narratives (Svensson 2016, 38).

This article employs the method of frame analysis to demonstrate how narratives of 'heritage under threat' employed in UNESCO Conventions are appropriated, circulated and implemented in China by different international and domestic actors. After introducing the theoretical and methodological approach, the study will familiarize the reader with the evolution of narratives within UNESCO Conventions, as well as how they were strategically appropriated, circulated and implemented in China.

Policy Narratives and Frames

Before examining Chinese appropriation of UNESCO policy narratives, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by 'policy narratives' and how I propose to examine them. Narratives are essentially stories 'which create and shape social meaning by imposing a coherent interpretation on the whirl of events and actions around us' (Fischer 2003,

161). Following Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) ‘these narrative facets constitute a policy narrative when the author or group strategically constructs the story to try to win the desired policy outcome’ (2011, 375). In this process of creating policy narratives, ‘scientific uncertainty is translated into political certainty by the use of dominant stories in the policy process’ (Radaelli 1999, 671). It is imperative to create a storyline to frame an issue as a problem. As Stone (2011) notes, “most definitions of policy problems have narrative structure, however subtle. Problem definitions are stories with a beginning, middle, and an end, involving some change or transformation. They have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit forces of evil against forces of good” (2011, 158).

Policy narratives are thus intentionally constructed stories including information concerning why policy problems and how they can be solved. Therefore, policy narratives commonly appear in the process of political agenda-setting and problem formulation (see also Gusfield 1980, Zittoun 2009) and have a significant impact on policy implementation (Fischer 2003, 161), by creating a framework for interpreting these socio-political events. In short, policy narratives are embedded in socio-political, moral and cultural contexts and disseminate a causal story about causes and effects of a certain problem to legitimize policy, form public opinion or trigger action (Radaelli 1999; Cramb 2009).

This paper conceptually understands narratives comprising a number of ‘frames’. I recognize that it difficult to distinguish between narratives and frames, as they are often used interchangeably or lumped together. According to Goffman (1974), frames render ‘a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful’ (1974, 21). In contrast, according to Shanahan, McBeth and Hathaway (2011), narratives ‘constitute a policy narrative when the author or group strategically constructs the story to try to win

the desired policy outcome' (2011, 375). Yet Schön and Rein, for instance speak of a 'frame-narrative' which relates to 'a particular kind of "normative-prescriptive" story that provides a sense of what the problem is and what should be done about it' (Schön und Rein 1996, 89), thus lumping the two together. Other scholars have pointed out, that narratives are different from frames as narratives have 'a beginning, a middle and an end' (Roe 1994, 114; Stone 2011: 158). In contrast to narratives, following Benford and Snow (2000), frames are frequently 'aligned', thus joined together, in order to mobilize for collective action.

Both concepts are difficult to differentiate because they both are constructed in a strategic manner (Snow et al. 1986, 478; Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011, 375) for the sake of triggering action (Benford and Snow 2000; Stone 2011, 13). Frames and narratives thus share the discursive element of a story and an inherent strategically chosen plan for action. They share similar characteristics precisely because narratives are made up of frames. This paper therefore understands policy narratives to consist of various frames aligned in a causal order of "beginning, middle and end" to tell a story.

By assuming that narratives comprise a variety of frames, the researcher can more easily examine the inherent structure of a given narrative. In doing so, this paper is in line with Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway's (2011) argument that 'policy narratives do contain frames that develop problem definitions based on the inclusion of some evidences and not other information to bolster a particular policy outcome' (2011, 375). Selecting inclusion of some frames (and information) over others is thus an important aspect of policy narrative analysis (see also Entman 1993).

Policy narratives, as proposed by the author, comprise but are not limited to (1) a value frame which attaches meaning to an event or issue by creating a value system; (2) a

problem frame which uses ‘facts’ to establish the belief or acceptance of a policy problem and (3) an action frame which prescribes a certain action plan (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Examining Policy Narratives through Frame Analysis

	<i>Emphasis</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Causal story</i>
Policy Narrative	Value Frame	Creates a certain value/belief system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value frame establishes something as valuable • The problem frame demonstrates that this value is in jeopardy • The action frame identifies a solution of the problem
	Problem Frame	Uses “evidence” to establish policy problem	
	Action Frame	Calls for certain measures of action	

(Source: Author)

Frames and narratives should, however, be differentiated from other notions such as discourses. Hager and Laws (2008), for instance, classify narratives as discourses (2008, 260). Yet discourses are much larger than narratives, to the extent of linking various narratives into one entity. Following Smith (2006), for instance, the global heritage discourse ‘simultaneously draws on and naturalizes certain narratives and cultural and social experiences – often linked to ideas of nation and nationhood’ (2006, 4), thus going beyond the logic of a ‘beginning, a middle and an end’ and highlighting that discourses are not equivalent to but *contain* narratives. I therefore regard narratives as being on a different linguistic level than discourses (Martin and Ringham 2000, 51), functioning as a discursive strategy (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 65) within discourses. Understanding discourse in the Foucauldian sense, as ‘a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance’ (Diamond and Quinby 1988, 185), narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ is thus part of

heritage discourses exerting power by determining what heritage is and what it is not (Smith 2006).

To examine how Chinese state and non-state actors differently appropriate and disseminate the international policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’, this study employs the method of frame analysis (Creed, Langstraat and Scully 2002; Bondes and Heep 2012). The study examines how the narrative is discursively created by various actors in texts and speeches thereby disseminating certain problem, value or action frames. This method was chosen as this study aims to examine how international policy narratives inherently change when appropriated domestically and by different actors in an authoritarian country. In identifying inherent frames as subunits of a given policy narrative, it becomes possible to retrace even the smallest changes in its inherent structural logic. The study therefore focuses on a qualitative analysis of the discursive elements and strategies within the narratives and does not seek to explain causal effects, as for instance Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) propose in their Narrative Policy Analysis framework.

The study’s frame analysis is based on an extensive study of UNESCO documents, official Chinese language policy papers, laws, media reports, academic articles as well as 55 qualitative semi-structured interviews with officials, cultural heritage ‘experts’ and local cultural practitioners. The empirical case of the PRC was chosen, firstly, since most policy narrative literature focuses on democratic settings, not authoritarian political systems. This case analysis can thus provide insights into how the appropriation, dissemination and implementation of policy narratives differ in a political context which extensively uses propaganda (Wu 1994). Secondly, as the PRC condemned traditional culture in the past, even destroying heritage during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Hou 2016, 497), examining the way the Chinese party-state

uses international policy narratives to protect domestic traditional culture today is of particular empirical interest. This is especially the case, as China, after joining the ICHC, has not only begun to strongly promote ICH domestically, but also internationally such as within the UNESCO (Bertacchini, Liuzza, and Meskell 2017).

Creating a Policy Narrative of Threat at the UNESCO

Originating from the UNESCO, the policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ tells the story of how and why heritage is disappearing (problem), why it constitutes a valuable part of society (value) and how it can be protected from ‘destruction’ (action). While the UNESCO’s first conventions aimed to prevent the destruction of cultural property during armed conflict (UNESCO 1954), the UNESCO soon identified socio-economic change as the main threat. In the 1972 WHC, for instance, the preamble commences by arguing that cultural and natural heritage ‘are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction’ (UNESCO 1972). Since the 1970s, UNESCO’s international heritage conventions have thus incorporated a policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ highlighting natural decay and socio-economic changes.

This problem frame is substantiated by scientific expertise, from UNESCO expert bodies such as ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN (UNESCO 2018a). The problem of ‘heritage under threat’ is based on the value frame, arguing that traditional culture is of ‘outstanding universal value from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view’ (Art. 1) and should be preserved for future generations (Art. 4). The policy narrative furthermore includes other value-based concepts such as ‘outstanding universal value’, ‘authenticity’ or ‘cultural heritage of humanity’ (UNESCO 1972). Due

to its value, the WHC calls on States Parties to engage in international cooperation and domestic governmental ‘legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures’ (Art. 5.4), for ‘counteracting the dangers that threaten its cultural or natural heritage’ (Art. 5.3) (UNESCO 1972) – which makes up the action frame. Through international conventions and related documents, the UNESCO thus created and disseminated a policy narrative which justifies and mobilizes governmental and societal action for heritage protection.

UNESCO Conventions and their inherent narratives subsequently trigger action among their signatories, the States Parties. After signing the WHC, national governments implement it by, for instance, adopting laws and policies for heritage protection, establishing museums and identifying heritage sites for inclusion in domestic conservation programs (Bendix, Eggert and Peselmann 2012). Once a nomination dossier is presented to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the UNESCO advisory bodies, ICOMOS, IUCN and ICCROM evaluate whether the heritage sites meet the selection criteria. Heritage sites must be of ‘outstanding universal value’ and meet at least one of the ten selection criteria outlined in the WHC’s Operational Guidelines. The final decision lies with the World Heritage Committee, a group of 21 elected States Parties to the Convention (UNESCO 2018b).

National governments determine which domestic heritage site may be nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger. They have many reasons for implementing UNESCO Conventions. Besides the international recognition of governmental protection efforts, ‘having sites inscribed on the Convention’s list garners international and national prestige, enables access to the World Heritage Fund for monetary assistance, and brings the potential benefits of heightened public awareness, tourism, and economic development’ (Meskell 2013, 843).

Since the 1970s, the WHC has been subject to debate, ultimately leading to a reframing of its policy narrative. States Parties, particularly from developing countries, criticized that the WHC concept of ‘cultural heritage’ only incorporated the protection of material, grand forms of culture and neglected folk or immaterial forms (Smith 2006, 28). Furthermore, the concept of ‘outstanding universal value’, it was argued, substantiated an elitist view of cultural heritage, which needed to be ‘authentic’ in order to be preserved internationally – concepts which were all gauged as fostering an Eurocentric understanding² of cultural heritage (Musitelli 2002, 229-330; Starn 2002, 8; Smith 2006, 95-96). After several attempts to correct this ‘Eurocentric bias’, the UNESCO adopted the ICHC in 2003, aiming to complement the WHC by safeguarding traditional cultural practices (UNESCO 2003a).

In contrast to the WHC, the new ICHC reflects a policy narrative change. In the preamble of the ICHC, the policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ was extended to not only include natural decay and socio-economic changes but also ‘globalization’ as causes of threat. Furthermore, new concepts were added to the value frame such as the necessity to safeguard ‘human rights’ and ‘cultural diversity’ (Preamble). As a reaction to the criticism of the WHC, the concepts of ‘outstanding universal value’ and ‘authenticity’ were removed and replaced with an emphasis on ‘local community participation’. Since 2003, the new policy narrative of ‘(intangible cultural) heritage under threat’ thus tells the story of the inherent value of traditional culture for the local community who have the cultural right to safeguard ‘their history (...) [which] provides

² Laurajane Smith (2006) has argued that the UNESCO, via its documents, Conventions and expert bodies, is disseminating an ‘authorized heritage discourse’ (AHD) which determines what heritage is and what it is not according to a Western understanding of heritage.

them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity' (Art. 2) from generation to generation. Again the 'grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction' (Preamble) are to be counteracted by inventories (Art. 12), 'scientific, technical and artistic studies, as well as research methodologies', 'appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures' (Art. 13) as well as 'educational, awareness-raising and information programmes' (Art. 14), providing an action frame for ICH safeguarding (UNESCO 2003a). Both conventions thus created and disseminated a narrative of threatened, valuable traditional culture which needs protection by state and society.

States Parties to the ICHC, like the WHC, pledge to safeguard ICH practices within their territory by creating safeguarding lists and ensuring the participation of local communities and NGOs in the safeguarding process. Comparable to the World Heritage List, States Parties may nominate an ICH practice to the UNESCO ICH Committee for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (UNESCO 2003a). Yet, while the States Party may pledge to safeguard ICH practices, international inscription of ICH at the UNESCO transforms ICH practices into a resource for national prestige and economic development (Meskell 2013: 483), potentially creating a certain dissonance between the UNESCO policy narrative and States Party objectives.

The Appropriation of UNESCO's Policy Narrative in China

UNESCO policy narratives are disseminated by the UNESCO, its States Parties, and transnational actors, such as academics, and subsequently appropriated by domestic actors through translation and congruence-building. The following subchapters will

examine how the ICHC's policy narrative was appropriated by the Chinese party-state, focusing on how translation and congruence-building processes took place, why, and who was involved.

Being part of international academic circles, Chinese academia had already employed UNESCO's narrative of 'heritage under threat' before the party-state fully adopted it in its official discourse. While in the 1990s some articles focused on the UNESCO's World Heritage Program or Chinese World Heritage Sites per se (Hu 1994; Chun 1998; Ji 2000), and directly alluded to the narrative, some scholars appropriated the policy narrative in a subtler way to advocate for the protection of cultural heritage. Xi'erweiniu and Zhong (1996), for instance, urged to increase governmental efforts to protect historical remains by repeatedly referring to the destructive forces of environmental pollution, plunder and tourism which cause an 'imminent danger' to valued heritage sites. Feng (1996) similarly uses the narrative of threat to draw attention to the loss of traditional cultural occupations, such as producing Chinese traditional 'snacks' (*xiaochi*) and performing traditional foot treatments. He calls for the 'rescue of threatened trades', as they are part of the motherland's cultural heritage and a 'treasure' of traditional Chinese crafts, thus emphasizing a value frame by invoking patriotic sentiment and excellence. In the decades prior to the ICHC' ratification, members of the Chinese scholarly community were thus not only aware of the 'UNESCO policy narrative of threat', but also attempted to appropriate it to demand greater governmental heritage protection.

Academic debates impact governmental action in China, as government officials and scholars are linked and influence each other through ICH policy networks (Maags and Holbig 2016). After the party-state became increasingly interested in folklore protection and UNESCO ICH-related projects in the late 1990s, members of the Chinese academia

were asked to support the party-state in implementing the ICHC in China, including translating UNESCO discourses into Chinese (Interview 3/2014, 35/2015). Academics such as Liu Kuili or Bamo Qubumu, both working at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a state-affiliated research institute, advised the party-state in how to implement the ICHC in China (CASS 2006).

Prior to ICHC ratification in 2004, various Chinese terms existed to describe traditional cultural practices, e.g. folk culture (*minjian wenhua*) or ethnic folk culture (*minzu minjian wenhua*). In the years leading to the ICHC, academics debated different approaches to translating ‘intangible cultural heritage’ into Chinese. While some favored the direct Japanese translation (*wuxing wenhua yichan*), meaning ‘non-form cultural heritage’, others advocated the use of a neologism, namely ‘non-tangible cultural heritage’ (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*), which does not make grammatical sense in Chinese (Bamo 2008). As the term does not match cultural understandings, some scholars noted that it appears unfamiliar and distant to the public. As a national-level ICH scholar argued, ‘There is no expression for ICH in Chinese. We historically have not considered anything “intangible” (Interview 07/2014). Striving to rapidly implement the ICHC domestically, the party-state settled for the latter translation (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*) making it the official Chinese translation in China and at the UNESCO. Debates within Chinese academia prior to the ICHC thus influenced the official translation and congruence-building of UNESCO’s policy narrative in China.

After this translation became official, the term ICH became a label to rebrand ICH practices and policies in China. As mentioned above, Chinese had previously referred to traditional cultural practices as “(ethnic) folk culture” ((*minzu*) *minjian wenhua*). Therefore, in the early 2000s the party-state had started to implement ‘folk culture protection projects’ (IHChina 2018). According to a national-level ICH expert ‘After

China joined in 2004, we took “folk culture protection” and changed it into “ICH protection” (...) our so-called folk culture protection projects are actually very similar to these [ICH safeguarding] models’ (Interview 04/2015). The term ICH thus replaced the term ‘folk culture’. This had considerable consequences, as one provincial-level expert explained: ‘Previously people may have considered (these practices) as bad, as superstition, because they are an ancient way of doing things. But now, because there is ICH, much more culture can be protected’ (Interview 37/2015). The ICH term thus provided an opportunity to create a new label for traditional culture in China and associated policies. How ICH is protected has also partially changed, as another ICH national-level expert argued. Since joining the ICHC, the creation of safeguarding lists, for instance, has become a key feature in domestic heritage work (Interview 55/2015).

With the translation of the ICHC into Chinese (see UNESCO 2003b) and the adoption of ICH policies, the policy narrative of ‘ICH under threat’ entered the official Chinese heritage discourse. Examining the Chinese ICH law which was drafted – in cooperation with Chinese academics - in 2005 and finally adopted in 2011, both UNESCO policy narratives (WHC and ICHC) are clearly visible. Article 17, for instance, stipulates that ‘with regard to the items of intangible cultural heritage that are on the verge of extinction (...) [governmental agencies] shall immediately record and collect the relevant physical objects or adopt other rescue and preservation measures’ (WIPO 2011). While the basic problem frame of ‘heritage under threat’ was adopted in the law by referring to its ‘extinction’ and its need to be ‘rescued’, the law furthermore mirrors value and action frames from the WHC and ICHC. In accordance with UNESCO’s policy narratives, ICH’s ‘historical, literary, artistic or scientific value’ (Art. 3) and ‘authenticity’ are to be preserved to maintain a ‘cultural identity’ and ensure ‘sustainable development’ (Art. 4). Furthermore, the law emphasizes that ICH is in fact

the ‘distinguished traditional culture of the Chinese nation’, pointing to a more elitist emphasis similar to the notion of ‘outstanding universal value’.

At the same time, however, the law also includes Chinese political concepts such as ‘maintaining the unification of the country and the unity of the nation and promoting social harmony’ (also Art.4) which all refer to the party-state’s ideological narrative of ‘socialist harmonious society’ (Hong 2010) and the ‘unified multi-ethnic state’ (China.org 2016). The Chinese ICH law thus includes concepts which were part of UNESCO’s WHC (authenticity, outstanding culture), ICHC (cultural identity, sustainable development) as well as Chinese political narratives. Furthermore, many elements of UNESCO’s action frame were included in the law, such as establishing inventories, conducting research, enhancing awareness-building and public participation in ICH safeguarding (Art. 8, 9, 11-21). The Chinese ICH law thus reflects both the WHC and ICHC narratives as well as Chinese political ideology.

The adoption of UNESCO’s policy narrative in Chinese legislation is even more evident in China’s main ICH policies issued by the State Council. In the State Council’s Opinion on Concerning Strengthening China’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Work of 2005, ICH is said to face ‘imminent extinction’, ‘continued loss’ (Art. 1) and ‘imminent danger’ (Art.2.) due to the ‘increasing trend of globalization’, the ‘abrupt economic and social change’ (Preamble) and ‘modernization’ (Art. 1), thereby explicitly mirroring the problem frame employed in UNESCO’s policy narrative within the ICHC. According to the 2005 policy, ICH is of ‘historic, cultural and scientific value’ and ‘precious’. Therefore its ‘authenticity’ (Art. 2), inherent ‘cultural identity’ and ‘cultural rights’ need to be preserved to ensure a ‘sustainable development’ (Art.1) (SC 2005) and because traditional culture is the carrier of ‘humanity’s social civilization’ and the ‘world’s cultural diversity’ (Art.1.). This reflects UNESCO’s concept of world

heritage. Finally, in explaining the reasoning, the policy points to the ‘urgency’ and ‘importance’ of ICH protection work (Art. 1). All these concepts make up the value frame inherent in the Chinese version of the policy narrative.

To summarize, the 2005 policy clearly reiterates UNESCO’s policy narrative by pointing to the threat of globalization, socio-economic change and modernization towards ICH (problem frame). Furthermore, it emphasizes the ICHC’s value frame: that ICH is valuable for safeguarding cultural diversity, rights and identity. Like the ICH law, the 2005 policy thus also combines frames and concepts mentioned in both the WHC and the ICHC. Moreover, the narrative also includes Chinese political ideology such as the ‘scientific outlook on development’ - a concept stipulated by President Hu Jintao in 2004. This concept includes a call for enhancing ‘sustainable development’ (Holbig 2009, 48), and fostering ‘patriotic education’ - a governmental slogan since the early 1990s (Zhao 1998). A comparison of the policy narrative inherent in WHC, ICHC and Chinese national laws and policies is summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Comparing Policy Narratives within Heritage Conventions and Chinese ICH Laws and Policies

	World Heritage Convention (1972)	ICH Convention (2003)	Chinese ICH Policy (2005)	Chinese ICH Law (2011)
<i>Problem Frame</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destruction • Socioeconomic changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalisation/modernisation • Socioeconomic changes • Ignorance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalisation, Modernisation • Socioeconomic Changes • Threat-related terms* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is on the verge of extinction • Threat-related terms*
<i>Value Frame</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding universal value • Heritage of humanity • Authenticity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural diversity • Cultural rights and identity • Local community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural rights and identity • Authenticity/values • Sustainable development <p>➤ Chinese traditional culture</p> <p>➤ Harmonious society</p> <p>➤ Multi-ethnic unified nation state</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural rights and identity • Authenticity, values • Sustainable development <p>➤ Scientific Outlook on Development</p> <p>➤ Patriotic education</p>
<i>Action Frame</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies & laws • Research • Administration • Increase awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies & laws • Research • Administration • Increase awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies & laws • Research • Administration • Increase awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies & laws • Research • Administration • Increase awareness

(*) Threat-related terms include: imminent threat, danger, destruction, attack, need of rescue
 ➤ Added Chinese political ideological terms

(Source: Author)

The congruence-building process by which the UNESCO's "narrative of threat" was appropriated in China thus occurred in various steps. First UNESCO documents and inherent narratives had to be translated into Chinese, which then were used to draft policies and laws. To achieve congruence between preexisting and new narratives and to align UNESCO narratives with domestic political objectives, the Chinese party-state combined previously existing, political ideological concepts with UNESCO narratives. Interestingly, however, the Chinese "narrative of threat" includes frames of both the WHC and the ICHC. This combination could be based on a misunderstanding of the difference between the narratives employed in the WHC and ICHC. Yet it appears more plausible that the party-state actively chose to emphasize the 'excellence' and 'authenticity' of Chinese heritage, thus its value frame, since enhancing the value of ICH among the populace would foster national pride and enhance ICH's economic value as well.

By strategically integrating UNESCO's policy narrative in Chinese national legislation, the party-state not only demonstrates compliance with UNESCO objectives by preserving 'cultural diversity' and 'cultural rights' for a global 'sustainable development', but also legitimizes Chinese policies internationally and domestically. At the same time, these objectives resonate with the preexisting political ideology and propaganda: Firstly, the party-state promotes the 'united multi-ethnic state' narrative used to more strongly integrate Chinese ethnic minorities, such as the Tibetans, in the nation-state (Shepherd 2009). Secondly, it substantiates the party-state's 'people-centered outlook', incorporated in Hu Jintao's concept of 'scientific outlook on development' and 'harmonious society', which has the aims, among others, to respond to 'people's growing and increasingly diverse material and cultural needs, (...) the appearance of all sorts of thoughts and cultures (...) and growing enthusiasm for political participation' (Holbig 2009, 50-51). Thirdly, by preserving and promoting China's traditional culture, the party-state fosters cultural nationalism among the populace, a political objective since the 1990s (Guo 2003, xii).

Since UNESCO's policy narrative is in line with various political ideological concepts of the CCP and can be strategically appropriated to promote its objectives, the party-state eagerly adopted the narrative to fit its domestic needs. Yet, while it is striking that the party-state has adopted so many UNESCO terms and concepts, especially that of cultural rights, a human right, this does not imply that its protection is actually enforced and can be claimed by the populace. The Chinese party-state always prioritizes 'social stability' over citizens' rights (Kent 1999, 165, 202-203).

Moreover, the Chinese version of the narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ has also undergone changes over time. Whereas the notion of cultural rights is mentioned in the landmark policy of 2005 (SC 2005), it is not mentioned in the 2011 ICH law (SC 2011), indicating that it was subsequently dropped. UNESCO concepts have been replaced by indigenous ones: The party-state has, for instance, developed various slogans for ICH safeguarding, such as ‘Safeguarding as the principle issue, rescuing comes first, rational use, transmitting development’ (*baohu weiyi, qiangjou diyi, heli liyong, chuancheng fazhan*) (SC 2005). This evolution of policy narratives over time suggests that congruence-building does not stop after the initial appropriation takes place, but is a continuous, country-specific process in which foreign narratives are more strongly integrated in domestic political discourses and narratives.

Narrative via State Media and Academic Publications

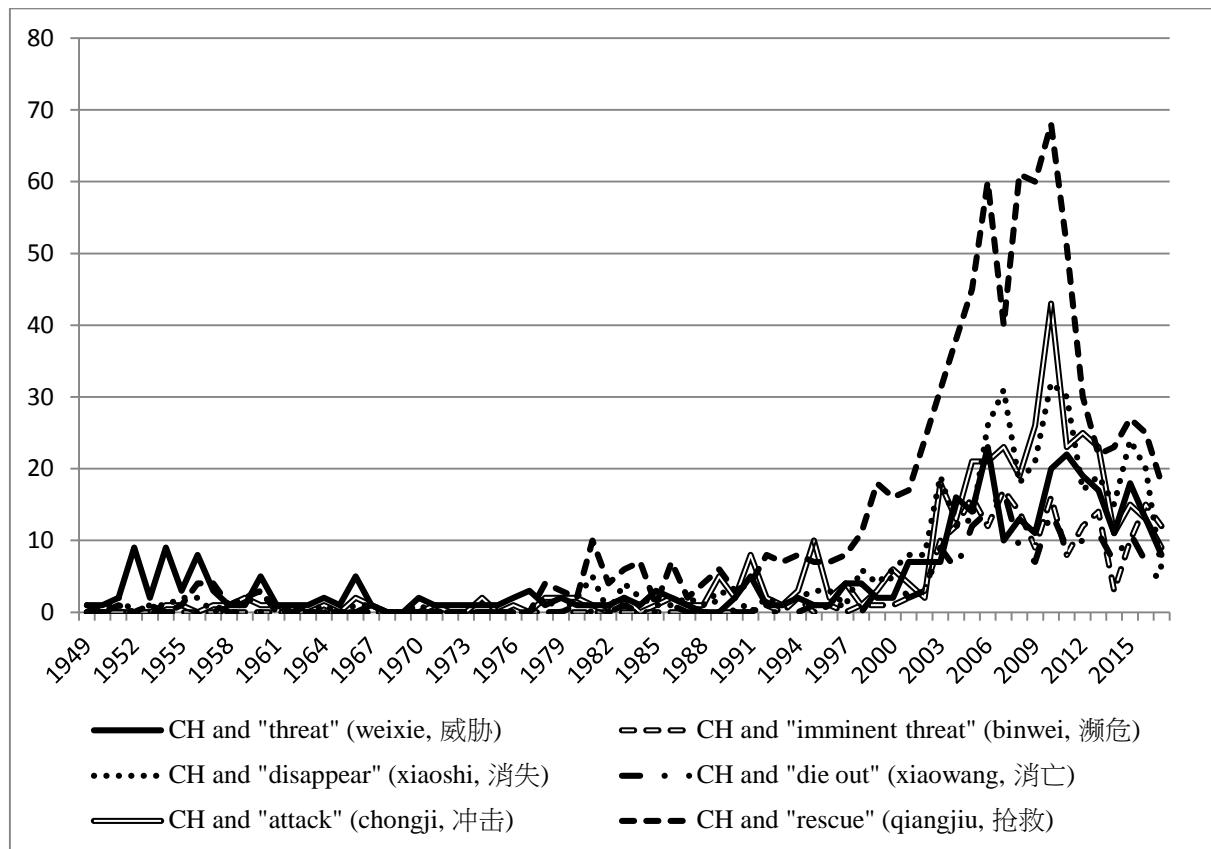
The new, official Chinese version of UNESCO’s policy narrative was subsequently disseminated through state media. An analysis of the reporting of the People’s Daily, the mouth-piece of the CCP (Wu 1994), before and after the PRC’s ratification of the ICHC in 2004 exemplifies how the party-state uses the media to spread its version of the policy narrative. Examining all People’s Daily articles from 1949 to 2017³ using ‘cultural heritage’⁴ and other key words⁵ as employed in the 2005 ICH policy, we can

³ The author used the Crossasia.org database of the People’s Daily to obtain data from 1949 to 2012. As the database ends in 2012, the 2013 to 2017 data was retrieved from the CNKI database of the People’s Daily, which ranges from 1979 to the present.

⁴ The key word ‘cultural heritage’ was used instead of ‘intangible cultural heritage’, as the results of the analysis will refer to all articles on tangible and intangible cultural heritage and highlight how often the key words used were included in earlier articles during the 1990s, when ICH as a term was not used in China.

see that after ratification, the use of terms like ‘threat’, ‘imminent danger’, ‘disappear’, ‘die out’, ‘attack’ and ‘rescue’ in conjunction with ‘cultural heritage’ has increased drastically in People’s Daily articles. The results of this analysis are depicted in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. The People’s Daily and the Narrative of ‘Heritage under Threat’



(Source: Analysis by the author; data obtained through the Crossasia.org database)

⁵ As Chinese laws, policies and media articles often employ official discourses in a verbatim manner, the author chose to select central key words from the State Council’s 2005 policy to identify the policy narrative in texts. However, the author is aware that the same narrative may also be told using non-official words.

Although a few articles did associate heritage with threat prior to 2004, particularly during the 1950s⁶, the narrative was not prevalent or widespread. The association between heritage and threat again increased after 1978, most probably due to China's exposure to the international community and UNESCO membership. However, the stark increase in articles only occurs after 2003/2004, indicating that the party-state is more actively spreading the narrative of 'Chinese heritage under threat' since ICHC adoption. People's Daily articles depict Chinese ICH as being in need of 'rescue' (*qiangjiu*) from 'attacks' (*chongji*) or threats, which may result in it 'disappearing' (*xiaowang*). Therefore, it needs rescue and protection by state and society. Finally, the articles commonly highlight Chinese heritage's 'excellence', 'radiating charm' (*meili*) or 'charisma' (*ganranli*) (Maags and Trifu 2018 forthcoming) as part of the value frame. The number of articles peaked during 2013, after which state media reduced the use of the narrative, potentially due to a shift in priorities after the leadership change in 2012 when Xi Jinping replaced Hu Jintao.

In addition to circulating the narrative via state media, government officials also use it in speeches. In 2005, the Minister of Culture, Sun Jiazheng (1998-2008), for instance, published an article explicitly referring to the narrative of threat. He argued that

In recent years, ICH protection is facing serious challenges [as it is] under the attack of economic globalization and modern civilization. (...) Modernization is destroying traditional culture with extraordinary and rapid ruthlessness and the cultural environment is undergoing violent change. Therefore ICH increasingly

⁶ During the 1950s, People's Daily articles created a narrative in which the threat of American imperialism was in part associated with destroying heritage in China and in other countries of the Global South.

losing the [social] environment it needs to exist and develop. Many ICH [practices] are facing eradication or imminent threat (PD 2005).

Similarly, the next Minister of Culture, Cai Wu (2008-2014), explained in an interview that ‘During the processes of globalization, urbanization and industrialization, Chinese traditional artistry cannot avoid being attacked. [For this reason] many people transmitting artistry are under imminent threat’ (MOC 2009). Using the keywords employed in the policy narrative, government officials thus consciously highlight that globalization and modernization are threatening traditional Chinese culture to promote its protection by state and society. In particular, the party-state portrays itself as the “protector” of Chinese heritage (Maags and Trifu 2018 forthcoming).

In disseminating this policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’, the party-state strategically uses a problem and value frame to mobilize support for its policies and safeguarding measures. Through national dissemination via laws, policies, media and so forth, the party-state has created its own version of UNESCO’s policy narrative which, after appropriation, has now become part of the official discourse on Chinese ICH safeguarding. Since the party-state

maintains control over the avenues of political expression by a multitude of means (...) [and] exercises direct control over political discourse by way of centralized management and manipulation of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” formulations (...) they set out to regulate what is being said and what is being written - and by extension what is being done (Schoenhals 1992, 3).

Knowing the explicit terms used in the party-state’s policy narrative is thus conducive to making claims of any form, since their use legitimizes action. The use of official

discourses or narratives is therefore a common strategy by non-state actors to discuss and potentially criticize governmental action.

While the UNESCO's policy narrative of "heritage under threat" was present in some academic articles prior to 2003, its use sharply increased after ICHC ratification. A search for articles on cultural heritage and the threat-related keywords mentioned above in the China Academic Journal database⁷ yields similar results as in the People's Daily analysis. As Figure 4 demonstrates, whereas only a small number of academic articles included the 'narrative of threat'⁸ before ratification (1949 - 2002), the number of articles skyrocketed after 2004.

[Insert Figure 4 approximately here]

As Figure 4 shows, academic articles started to use the official narrative particularly after the ICHC's ratification in 2004 and adoption of the 2005 ICH policy. Again, terms such as 'attack', 'rescue' and 'disappear' are employed in more articles than the terms 'threat', 'imminent threat' and 'die out', mirroring the results of the People's Daily analysis. Compared to the UNESCO narrative, the official Chinese policy narrative, as

⁷ The China Academic Journal (CAJ) database is compiled by the prestigious Tsinghua University and contains all articles of China's most frequently read academic journals from 1949 to today in some cases also from the pre-PRC era. As in the analysis of People's Daily articles, the search was conducted using the keyword 'cultural heritage' (subject) in combination with one threat-related keyword (full-text), namely 'threat', 'imminent danger', 'disappear', 'die out', 'attack' and 'rescue'. The CAJ database is available via Crossasia.org.

⁸ Articles featuring the term 'cultural heritage' and at least one of the identified keywords are considered to include the 'narrative of threat'. In most cases, the articles, however, included more than one of the keywords.

reflected in media and academic articles, thus emphasizes the more emotional concepts of ‘attack’ and ‘rescue’. This suggests a strategic decision to foster emotional ties to heritage, evoking a moral obligation to rescue - a term with positive connotation - Chinese cultural heritage under attack.

The extent to which and the way the articles employ the policy narrative varies from article to article. Bai (2008), for instance, opens his article by arguing that ‘ICH is not a renewable resource. Accompanied by the acceleration of globalization and modernization processes, a huge change is happening in China’s cultural environment; cultural heritage and the environment it exists in are under serious threat’ (2008, 3). Citing UNESCO conventions, the party-state’s ICH laws, policies and slogans, he calls for greater ICH protection, particularly of traditional martial arts, to preserve its ‘important value’ and by extension ‘global cultural diversity’. Similarly, Fan (2005), calls attention to the crisis facing ‘weak’ languages due to industrialization, globalization and Westernization. For the sake of creating a ‘harmonious society’ and preserving ‘cultural diversity’, the state needs emphasize studying ‘endangered languages’, including them in school curricula and granting cultural rights. Globalization and modernization are also the culprits in Feng’s (2006) article, in which he argues that ‘what makes people feel anxious is, that a lot of unique traditional music is being lost. Many of the folk musicians who have exceptional skills, body and mind, are getting old and their health is declining, so that there is a crisis since no people are left who can carry on this skill’ (2006, 38).

To gain more governmental attention and investment in ICH safeguarding, these scholars thus very explicitly appropriate the official policy narrative, copying the exact phrases and concepts employed in the UNESCO and PRC official documents. In doing so, they not only legitimize their claim but also critique the current situation. Using

official policy narratives is a common strategy for actors to make claims vis-à-vis or criticize the party-state since ‘official statements define the limits of permissible debate and create a politically safe framework within which analysts can express their views. Published analysis often explicitly refers to official policy, and analysts frequently restate policy verbatim on sensitive issues (...)’ (Chen 2003, 296). When the authors incorporate the narrative in a subtler way, scholars often attempt to legitimize their claim through other means such as applying Chinese and international scientific theories and methods (Cheng and Ling 2013; Maags and Holbig 2016). Other forms of expertise or prestige can thus similarly be used to legitimize a claim for ICH protection. Compared to the articles from the 1990s, scholarly articles published after the ICHC’s ratification display a more explicit use of the new official narrative by, for instance, identifying globalization and modernization as the main threats to ICH and incorporating concepts such as cultural diversity and cultural rights. All in all, Chinese academics contribute to the creation and dissemination of the policy narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ by circulating it through their publications.

The Strategic Implementation of the Policy Narrative

Top-down implementation processes of national policies ensure that these narratives are transferred to subnational government levels. Jiangxi province’s ICH policy of 2015, for instance, reiterates the narrative of threat by arguing that ICH subject to ‘imminent threat’ should be preserved by immediate ‘rescue’ measures (Art.23-24). Since ‘Chinese outstanding traditional culture’ is of ‘historic, literary, artistic and scientific value’ (Art. 15), its ‘authenticity’ should be preserved (Art. 4) through publicity and awareness-building events (Art. 7), an expert system (Art. 11) as well as ICH Inheritors (Art. 14) (JXCB 2015). This strong use of the official policy narrative can also be found in other provinces such as Henan (NYCB 2013) and Sichuan (SCCB 2014), while some

provinces, such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Yunnan incorporate the narrative to a lesser degree. In the case of Yunnan, policies at first continued to use the term “ethnic folk culture” instead of ICH (i.e. YNCD 2005), thus resisting the appropriation of UNESCO concepts locally. As Yunnan has a large ethnic minority population, it may have chosen to continue using the former concept which is more familiar to the local population. There are thus differences across China concerning to what extent the policy narrative is adopted in subnational policies and whether appropriated or pre-existing terms are used.

This variation in subnational policy narratives can be explained by subnational governments’ leeway in policy formulation and implementation (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988). Provincial ICH policies therefore can merely include elements of the national policy narrative, such as the need to ‘rescue’ ‘authentic’, ‘endangered ICH’ (see JSCB 2006; ZJCB 2007; YNCB 2013). Lower government levels thus contribute to the spread of official policy narratives, as they, often in a verbatim manner (Schoenhals 1992), incorporate national policy narratives into their own policies. Yet, as they adapt national policy narratives to fit subnational understandings and interests, these national narratives are again transformed along the way down to the local level. Through this trickling down of policy narratives, however, subnational governments may also strategically use them to legitimize policies which contradict ICH safeguarding. Jiangxi province’s cultural department’s 2007 policy, for instance, states that officials ‘should make use of every region’s outstanding ICH practices (...) and depend on them to develop cultural and tourism products as well as the cultural industry’ (Art. 5, JXCD 2007). Although the narrative of ‘heritage under threat’ does raise awareness for the need to safeguard ICH against processes of modernization, state and non-state actors in China and elsewhere have often used UNESCO narratives to legitimize the promotion

of ICH practices for economic development, for instance through the tourism industry (Wang and Bramwell 2012), undermining the original purpose of the narrative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the party-state strategically appropriated UNESCO's policy narrative of 'heritage under threat' to influence public opinion, legitimize policy choices and trigger action. To do so, the party-state amalgamated frames and concepts inherent in two UNESCO Conventions, the WHC and ICHC, as well as elements of domestic political ideology to create its own appropriated version of the UNESCO policy narrative. This process was facilitated by Chinese academics, supporting the translation and policy formulation process. After domestic appropriation, the policy narrative has continued to transform over time and across Chinese geographical regions and administrative levels. Chinese academia and state media further disseminate the Chinese policy narrative of 'heritage under threat', highlighting certain aspects of the narrative such as the emotional notions of 'attack' and 'rescue'.

Although based on a single case study, and not a comparison of democratic and authoritarian countries, the study points to some specific features of policy narratives in authoritarian systems. One might expect that because the PRC is a one-party state, non-state actors are excluded from the political processes. Nevertheless, academics were involved in translation and policy formulation. However, the party-state has the final word on how concepts are translated and how congruence is built, for instance, by explicitly incorporating concepts of CCP ideology and propaganda. The state subsequently steers the circulation of this officially-sanctioned policy narrative: on the one hand, through actively circulating it through state-controlled media, and on the other hand through setting indirect boundaries of what can and cannot be said.

Nevertheless, (local) state and non-state actors can misappropriate the policy narrative to pursue their own interests: either to lobby for greater governmental heritage protection or to legitimize subnational efforts of economic development. The appropriation of UNESCO's narrative of "heritage under threat" has thus produced a Chinese policy narrative which may foster domestic political and economic objectives, while also providing a "safe framework" to indirectly criticize the party-state.

In constructing policy narratives, actors commonly refer to values, problems and actions or solutions. The policy narrative of "heritage under threat" thereby tells the story of why heritage is valuable, what is threatening it and how it can be protected. Using frame analysis to examine policy narratives sheds light on the policy process in various manners: Firstly, it can highlight the strategic ways in which certain narratives are taken up in policy-related texts and speeches. Secondly, it can shed light on who integrates these narratives into policy and thus introduces them into the policy process. Finally, by retracing the strategic implementation of the policy narrative across government levels and over time, we can assess how narratives continue to transform during the subsequent stages of the policy process. There are, however, a few limitations to this study. As it has focused on retracing terms and frames employed in the UNESCO and Chinese policy narratives, it overlooks more subtle uses of the narrative or alternative discourses and is not able to detect to what extent actors have internalized the narrative. Secondly, as the study is based on a single authoritarian country, it lacks the insights a comparative case study, including democratic and authoritarian states, could generate. More research needs to be done concerning how and to what extent international discourses and policy narratives are appropriated, especially how these differ across regime types and geographical regions.

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