China’s Strategical Fossilization of Folk Belief as an Invariable International Heritage Asset

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1. Introduction

Legally, Chinese citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief."[1] The Chinese government officially recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism and Taoism. Goossaert and Palmer argue that the Chinese Communist Party strategically standardized these five religions. The party hereby intended to bridge the gap between the Chinese state's conflicting tendencies toward increasing religious open-mindedness and towards increasing bureaucratic control of religion.[2] Indeed, scholars find contradictions between the theoretical and practical management of religious beliefs in China. Zhu, for example, concludes that in accordance with Chinese law "a religion, in order to exist, must develop a harmonious relation with its social environment."[3] Zhu argues that in practice, Chinese law contains an opening for popular religious beliefs, which are neither secured nor cut out of laws regarding religion.[4] Popular religious beliefs thus hold an ambiguous position in China.

The Chinese government included celebrations involving religious components as public holidays. However, religious beliefs that are not connected to China's official five religions were not granted the status of national holidays or traditional festivals.[5] Nevertheless, UNESCO approved three Chinese cultural practices that are associated with folk religion or religious beliefs for inscription as intangible heritage in 2009.[6] The "Qiang New Year festival"[7] was inscribed on UNESCO's *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* in 2009. Two other practices were inscribed on UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, the "Dragon Boat festival"[8] and "Mazu belief and customs."[9] These inscriptions were the result of a nomination by the Chinese state itself, as state parties select which practices to nominate for this status.[10] The enlistment of the Qiang New Year festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Dragon Boat festival as intangible cultural heritage implies that the Chinese state recognizes them as religious beliefs that warrant (legal) protection. If this is true, their enlistment contradicts the ambiguous position of popular religious beliefs in China. As a result, how the Chinese state framed their nomination is of

[1] Communist Party of China Central Committee Institute of Party History and Literature, "Constitution of."
[2] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 58, 351, 417.
[3] Zhu, "Prosecuting "Evil,"" 501.
[4] Zhu, "Prosecuting "Evil,"" 499.
[5] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 58, 169, 237, 351, 417.
[6] Ku and Hong, "China's influence,"; Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation,"; Yuan, "Dragon Boat," 638-639.
[7] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Qiang New."
[8] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Dragon Boat."
[9] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Mazu belief."
[10] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Procedure of."

particular interest to understand the Chinese Communist Party's policy and narrative regarding religious freedom in China.

2009 marked the first time China nominated intangible heritage practices to UNESCO, and Mazu belief and customs, the Qiang New Year and the Dragon Boat festival were the only practices of these initial nominations related to popular religious beliefs. Firstly, the Dragon Boat festival is celebrated as an annual public holiday in China and involves multiple activities. Dragon boat races, consumption of glutinous rice dumplings, egg contests and activities associated with warding off evil influences are all practiced on this day. These different elements can also be connected to the several explanations for the existence of the festival. Allegedly, the origin is linked to the commemoration of Chinese dragons, Cao E, Qu Yuan, Wu Zixu, Yan Hongwo, Zhong Kui, the summer solstice period or to avert disease.[11] Research has identified a shift in perception and practice from the festival as a cultural custom to the festival as an athletic event. For example, scholars consider the Dragon Boat festival to involve (religious) rituals and ceremonies in a more traditional sense.[12] Indeed, the festival's herbal medicine markets remain popular throughout China and are associated with superior herbs.[13] Folklorists explain this by calling attention to the timing of the festival that coincides with a time of high prevalence of sickness.[14] The commemoration of historical figures is a another popular tradition in the festival and is regionally connected to the festival's glutinous rice dumplings. Local people supposedly tossed rice dumplings in rivers for fish to eat so as to prevent them from wasting away the bodies of Cao E, Qu Yuan and Wu Zixu after they plunged into rivers because they were considered good people. Because of Qu Yuan's loyalty to the King of Chu, calling attention to Qu in clarifying the origins of the festival could be seen to give it a more patriotic accent.[15] Thus, the origin(s) that the Chinese government has chosen to emphasize in the Dragon Boat festival nomination file is significant in determining how they want to brand the festival.

Secondly, the Qiang New Year festival is celebrated by the Qiang people in honor of the deities of the Qiang pantheon. Wang and Prott speak of "Qiang culture," as a tiny minor Chinese ethnicity located in Sichuan Province. The Qiang people communicate in two Qiang languages but these are mutually unintelligible and lack a written script. As a result, Qiang traditions and knowledge are passed on orally and Mandarin Chinese functions as a lingua franca.

[11] Yuan, "Dragon Boat," 638-639.
[12] McCartney and Osti, "From Cultural," 26, 30, 33, 39; Sofield and Sivan, "From Cultural," 9, 19.
[13] Wang et al., "Ethnobotanical study," 2; Gu et al., "Ethnobotanical study," 427.
[14] Groot, "Yearly celebrations," 254-255; Jin et al., "Ethnobotanical survey," 2.
[15] Yuan, "Dragon Boat," 639-640.

Traditionally, Qiang people revered deities of nature and a Shibi shaman takes the lead in ceremonies, rituals and practices. As a result, Wang and Prott refer to Shibi as "both the priests and custodians of [Qiang] tradition."[16] An example of the important role of Shibi can be seen in the practice of the Qiang New Year festival. Led by a Shibi, the Qiang people proffer gratitude and venerate the god of heaven on a yearly basis with a sacrificial goat.[17] Yet, Zhang explains that the Qiang New Year festival was originally a ritual and re-invented by the Chinese government to make it more "civilized" and integrative.[18] As a consequence of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the Qiang ethnicity lost 10% of its population.[19] The survival of Qiang people and traditions has been particularly threatened since this natural disaster. The fact that the Chinese state nominated the Qiang New Year festival to UNESCO has a further dimension in that it represents intangible heritage of a minority. The Chinese government may be motivated to nominate minorities' practices as a result of the connection Gladney identifies between the characterization of ethnicities and nation-building. According to Gladney, the exoticization of minorities not only solidifies the Han majority, but also contributes to constructing a Chinese nation. Chinese governmental discourse on minorities thus cannot be separated from the conception of the Han majority and Chinese nation. By rendering other ethnicities as exotic, primitive and distant from the Han majority, the untouched, clean Han majority is coalesced into one ""imagined" national identity."[20] Hence, the Chinese state's nominations of heritage related to ethnicities, including the Qiang New Year festival, may be explained as a strategy for nation-building.

Thirdly, Mazu belief is said to have originated in Meizhou, an island off the southeastern coast of mainland China. This is where Lin Moniang reportedly lived and became venerated as Mazu, or Tianhou, a goddess of the sea in the Song dynasty. She is worshipped for her protection of seafarers against natural calamities and raiders throughout China at temples, rituals, festivals and on pilgrimage routes.[21] Mazu worship is particularly popular in Taiwan, where its followers make up approximately 75% of the island's population, in turn fostering exchanges between Meizhou and Taiwan.[22] But Mazu veneration transcends Chinese borders. Some of the Chinese diaspora members in at least twenty countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia and the United

[16] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 27-30.
[17] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Qiang New Year festival."
[18] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 101, 105.
[19] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 28.
[20] Gladney, "Representing Nationality," 93-94, 117.
[21] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 116-117, 121; Shuo, Ryan and Liu, "Taoism, temples," 581-582; The Economist, "China hopes."
[22] Shuo, Ryan and Liu, "Taoism, temples," 581.

States are also Mazu followers. Mazu belief also spread historically with China's cultural influence in Asia. In Japan, this has led Mazu to become recognized as a Shinto deity.[23] Allio and Ku and Hong confirm a religious undertone of Mazu worship.[24] In consequence, Mazu belief and customs has religious connotations.

Following the nomination and inscription of Mazu belief and customs in 2009, there has been a growing research interest in Mazu. Currently, it flourishes especially concerning Taiwan as a center of Mazu belief and its role in cross-strait relations. For Qiang culture, research has focused on the survival of Qiang traditions in the aftermath of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The Dragon Boat festival is researched for its authenticity as cultural custom, its ability to harmonize Chinese people, its role in promoting tourism and its role in the transmission and perpetuation of knowledge of herbal medicine traditions in southern China. Nevertheless, there is a general lack of research on the nomination files of the intangible heritage practices of the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Qiang New Year festival.

Practices' nomination files come into play in UNESCO's nomination process. The Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage outlines how inscription onto UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage lists works. State parties that have ratified the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* are welcome to submit nominations on a yearly basis.[25] Governments can themselves decide which practices to nominate, and draft nomination documents. These documents must follow UNESCO's blueprint forms and guidelines to explain the practice and how it embodies UNESCO's criteria.[26] The Evaluation Body recommends whether a nomination should be accepted by the Committee, which is short for the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. If the Evaluation Body considers files are incomplete or requests supplementary information, state parties need to provide more materials to still be considered for the respective deadline. One and a half years after the original deadline, the Committee decides which nominations to inscribe.[27] UNESCO's bureaucratic system is operative for all state parties.

Nevertheless, the Western heritage framework is not entirely compatible with non-Western conceptions of heritage. In response to a recognition that the pre-existent tangible

[23] Ng, "The Shintoization," 225; Zhang, "Transnational Religious," 222-223.
[24] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 92-94; Ku and Hong, "China's influence," 241.
[25] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 37-39, 186.
[26] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 38-39; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Procedure of."
[27] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 38-40, 49, 56-58.

cultural heritage category was insufficient to encompass alternative conceptions of heritage, UNESCO added a category for intangible cultural heritage in 2003.[28] Chinese folk belief is one of those non-Western conceptions of heritage, at least that is what the Chinese state has argued since intangible heritage was incorporated into the country's heritage framework in 2004.[29] UNESCO's accommodation also called for a different terminology for inscribed heritage items. "Site" refers to tangible cultural heritage, whereas "element" indicates intangible cultural heritage. However, not all concepts related to heritage sites were applicable for intangible heritage. For example, authenticity is contested in the context of intangible heritage. Harrison and Taylor also identify the complexity of incorporating cultural pluralist ideas into our consciousness, let alone institutions. Incorporating a foreign cultural idea implies a uniformity of classificatory systems that does not actually exist because classificatory systems constitute distinct cultural conceptions.[30] Both Harrison and Taylor propose a dialogical solution for different cultural practices to co-exist. Appropriate recognition is an essential factor for identity to be recognized in this solution.[31] However, there are risks to this method. If a dialogical solutions fails or is undesired by administrators, it may cause inappropriate recognition or misrecognition instead. As a result of these conceptual differences and risks, incorporating Chinese folk religion into the Western intangible heritage framework meaningfully is challenging.

Misrecognition can infringe upon the independent agency and power of heritage practitioners. Taylor and Lixinski argue that misrecognition can be not only disrespectful, but also harmful and oppressive.[32] For Whittington, heritage selection can exacerbate rights of groups that are socially disparaged.[33] Furthermore, heritagization, which refers to how cultural practices are rendered as heritage for commercial purposes, risks excluding the communities whose heritage is at stake.[34] Indeed, Zhao presents Fangyan as a case where heritage was misused to the extent that it challenges the integrity and tradition behind it. In this city, multiple heritage initiatives by the local government served only economic purposes. The relocation and subsequent exclusion of a temple in the city center of Fangyan recreated the city's axiality in an area where local companies could benefit. The creation of an entertainment park for Fangyan's Hugong Dadi folk belief also tarnished the local folk religion. Lastly, the forced

[28] Hafstein, "Intangible Heritage," 133; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 23-25.
[29] Chen, "For Whom," 308.
[30] Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 28-29, 206, 221; Taylor, "The Politics," 71-73.
[31] Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 206, 216-217; Taylor, "The Politics," 25, 32.
[32] Taylor, "The Politics," 25-26.
[33] Whittington, "Gender and," 243.
[34] Law, "The Role," 233-234; Lixinski, "A Tale," 8; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 47.

remotion of local people was used to create a landscape befitting of being a World Heritage site.[35] Similar to the threats of integrity and tradition heritage can face, Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska raise the concept of "cultural authenticity,"[36] which can be tarnished by heritagization. Consequently, it appears that heritage impairment can be caused by harmful conservation practices. Due to these infringements, Zhao concludes that governing heritage should be up to heritage practitioners themselves. The involvement of regional governments should be restricted so that they are not able to govern heritage.[37]

In fact, there are more ways in which governments can use heritage for their benefit. Smith explains that heritage can be used as an instrument to control contending narratives of identity, for example on a local level.[38] The Chinese state may have correspondingly used popular religious elements of the Dragon Boat festival, Qiang New Year festival and Mazu belief and customs by characterizing them as mainstream practices in the shape of heritage. At the same time, scholars have identified World Heritage status as a possible solution for folk religions to achieve mainstream, legitimate status.[39] Nevertheless, this strategy is not without disadvantages for cultural practices.[40] Even though the institutionalization of intangible cultural heritage is perceived to have the practices' best interests at heart, it potentially has the opposite result of (1) endangering cultural diversity, (2) hierarchizing different practices, (3) changing practices or (4) rendering practices fixed, thereby preventing them from change.[41] Overall, the institutionalization of intangible cultural heritage can thus constitute a counterproductive process for the integrity of practices themselves. Considering these four counterproductive results for the viability of cultural practices, China's nomination of these popular religious practices as World Heritage indicates the Chinese state could be employing Chinese heritage instrumentally.

Analysis of these nomination files to determine whether China is using its heritage for ulterior motives is lacking. Research regarding the content and phrasing of the Dragon Boat festival and Qiang New Year festival nomination files in particular is unprecedented, or at least

[35] Zhao, "Local versus," 85-88, 97-98.
[36] Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska, "Chinese Destinations," 7588-7589, 7598.
[37] Zhao, "Local versus," 74, 97-98.
[38] Smith, Uses of Heritage, 298.
[39] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 14-15; Chen, "For Whom,"; Gao "How does,"; Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question,"; Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 101; Zhou, "Folk Belief."
[40] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 12; Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 342-344; Zhou, "Folk Belief," 158.
[41] Alivizatou, "The Paradoxes," 18; Chen, "For Whom," 309, 330; Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 14; Hafstein, "Intangible Heritage," 127, 134; Herzfeld, "Intangible Delicacies," 52-53, 59; Kuutma, "From Folklore," 52; Lixinski, "A Tale," 2; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Procedure of,"; Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 105-106; Zhou, "Folk Belief," 155, 159-161.

in English. Zhang does discuss the effects of protective domestic intangible heritage programs for Qiang traditions, and integrates the Qiang New Year festival nomination file where relevant. In doing so, she concludes that the nomination is lacking in adequate community participation.[42] The Mazu belief and customs nomination file has been analyzed before by Chiang, but only in relation to the translation of Western heritage terms, and Allio, who only notes the detachment between the bureaucratic style of the file and the reality of Mazu belief and finds faults with the community participation section of the nomination file.[43] This research thus contributes the dimension of religious recognition to the examination of the nomination files.

That the state's conception of folk belief can compromise the agency and power of believers also holds true for the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Qiang New Year festival. Indeed, Allio confirms that this discord, heritage modification and well-being of their heritage are also risks that Mazu believers face, especially in the way the belief is presented in China's nomination file to UNESCO.[44] Similarly, Zhang argues the misrepresentation of the Qiang New Year festival means it is becoming less important and worthwhile for Qiang people themselves.[45] This risk also applies to the Dragon Boat festival, as the commodification of the cultural custom threatens the future of the practice and its integrity.[46] Evidently, the agency and power of believers regarding their practices are at stake in the framing of folk religion in the nominations of the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Qiang New Year festival.

Yet, to what end the Chinese state is utilizing folk religious aspects of Chinese heritage remains unclear. China's initial UNESCO nominations can shed light on any strategic aims behind the popular religious elements involved in the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and Qiang New Year festival, and in turn behind the Chinese state's early intangible heritage utilization more generally. Concerns regarding the integrity of folk religion in relation to China's five official religions raise the following question, which is also the research question of this thesis: why did the Chinese government choose to nominate popular religious practices as UNESCO intangible heritage? Close reading of Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Qiang New Year festival nomination files reveal a strategic Chinese governmental desire of directly managing and altering folk practices. As a result, these religious traditions and beliefs are internationally branded as intangible heritage as a means of exerting

[42] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 97, 104.
[43] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 107-109; Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated."
[44] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 113.
[45] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 105-106.
[46] McCartney and Osti, "From Cultural," 38-39; Sofield and Sivan, "From Cultural," 9.

control over folk belief. Thus, the Chinese government acknowledges folk beliefs on national and international levels as heritage in order to expropriate and paradoxically overshadow the religious connotations behind these heritage practices.

2. Literature review

2.1 China's Heritage Strategy

Heritage, and UNESCO's framework of heritage in particular, are inherently political.[47] Askew argues that state parties of UNESCO use heritage to their own advantages to construct nationalism and cultural hegemony.[48] According to Yan, countries are the most powerful agents in heritage management. They employ heritage to reach cultural, political and social aims, for example to enhance nation-building or legitimacy. States can implement this through determining and controlling the dominant memories prevalent in heritage.[49] Furthermore, Shepherd argues that UNESCO itself turns a blind eye to the political role of heritage while acknowledging its cultural and economic roles. UNESCO's focus on heritage maintenance, protection and appearance overshadows countries' sovereignty over heritage itself.[50] Hence, culture and politics are intertwined in heritage management, and UNESCO specifically, effectively impacting society and economy.

States can manage heritage and develop a strategy for their tangible heritage sites and intangible heritage practices. These strategies can include national as well as international goals. Aygen and Logan provide one such international goal in the case of China. They argue that China desires to display itself as a modern nation-state and outplay the West on the international stage of heritage. They also point to the increasingly influential position of Asia on this stage. Still, while this ability to work with UNESCO's framework can be attributed not only to China but also to the region itself, China's involvement and strategy surpasses that of other Asian countries.[51] Nevertheless, utilization of heritage is not always advantageous. Herzfeld and Yan argue that states experience double-edged consequences in the utilization of heritage. On the one hand, heritage can instill the population with pride. On the other hand, it can display the state's rigidity and inflexibility towards cultural pluralism.[52] Therefore, managing heritage can have domestic and international benefits as well as disadvantages.

Nevertheless, states have to work within UNESCO's framework to realize any strategy on an international scale. Scholars find that the differences between UNESCO's purpose of recording representative heritage and states' heritage strategies can be bridged. This also applies

[47] Askew, "The magic," 23, 38-41; Hevia, "World Heritage," 220-221; Kuutma, "From Folklore," 52; Melis, Wise and Badurina, "Geo-political complexities," 1; Shepherd, "UNESCO and," 248-249; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 298; Yan, "The making," 598.
[48] Askew, "The magic," 23.
[49] Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 239.
[50] Shepherd, "UNESCO and," 248-249.
[51] Aygen and Logan, "Heritage in," 415-416, 421.
[52] Herzfeld, *Subversive Archaism*, 9; Yan, "World Heritage," 230.

to the case of China. Tomczak appraises China's membership of UNESCO, and finds that Chinese legislation and administration regarding tangible heritage perfectly adhere to UNESCO standards. At the same time, she concludes that the Chinese government has dual objectives in adhering to UNESCO's rules and practices by concomitantly obeying them and adapting the existing global heritage apparatus to suit its needs.[53] Yan, Hevia and Bortolloto et al. confirm China's ability to work successfully within UNESCO's framework while following its own agenda.[54] Evidently, because China is able to adopt UNESCO's framework and adapt it to its own advantage, the country can use it to manage heritage strategically.

Research demonstrates that China obtains strategic benefits from accommodating UNESCO's framework. Motivations for China to adhere to UNESCO guidelines are here generalized into the following categories: (1) economic development,[55] (2) tourism, related to culture and ethnic minorities in particular,[56] (3) modernization,[57] (4) social cohesion and stability,[58] (5) urban and place branding,[59] (6) political legitimacy,[60] (7) nationalism and solidarity,[61] (8) national pride,[62] (9) governing culture, society and religion,[63] (10) nation-building for a common Chinese identity, including the recasting of history, partially through heritage,[64] (11) soft power, such as China's image,[65] and (12) China's global position and

[53] Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 303, 314-315.
[54] Bortolotto et al., "Proving participation," 72-73; Hevia, "World Heritage," 237-238; Yan, "World Heritage," 238.
[55] Harris, "Uyghur Heritage," 134-135; Ludwig and Walton, "Introduction: (Un)Authorised," 16; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14.
[56] Aygen and Logan, "Heritage in," 415-416, 421; Harris, "Uyghur Heritage," 134-135; Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Ludwig and Walton, "Introduction: (Un)Authorised," 16; Shepherd, "Cultural Heritage," 55, 74-75; Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska, "Chinese Destinations," 7581, 7598-7599; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 33-34, 47-48.
[57] Aygen and Logan, "Heritage in," 415-416, 421; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14.
[58] Jacquesson, "Claiming heritage," 326; Lixinski, "A Tale," 6; Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 33-34, 47-48; Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 315; Wertmann, "Creating Cultural," 169-170; Wu, "To share," Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.
[59] Law, "The Role," 215-218; Lincoln and Madgin, "The Inherent," 939; Ludwig and Walton, "Introduction: (Un)Authorised," 16.
[60] Harris, "Uyghur Heritage," 134-135; Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14; Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 315; Wertmann, "Creating Cultural," 169-170; Wu, "To share," Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.
[61] Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 315; Wertmann, "Creating Cultural," 169-170; Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.
[62] Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14; Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 315.
[63] Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.
[64] Aygen and Logan, "Heritage in," 415-416, 421; Gladney, "Representing Nationality," 93-93; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 13-14; Tomczak, "Is China," 313; Wu, "To share,"; Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.
[65] Harris, "Uyghur Heritage," 134-135; Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 33-34, 47-48; Tomczak, "Is China," 298, 315; Wu, "To share;" Yan, "World Heritage," 230, 238-239.

competitiveness.[66] The fact that managing religion appears as one of the motivations, and that China's heritage is used to convey an overarching, national narrative is of particular interest here. There is certainly no doubt among scholars that China uses heritage for political and economic purposes, on local, national as well as international levels. Heritage thus serves to aid Chinese interests domestically and internationally in heritage strategies.

2.2 The Genuineness of Heritage Nominations

Heritage can be disingenuously presented as something it is not. Scholars argue that heritage is constantly reimagined.[67] For Smith, heritage in general compromises a "cultural process" [68] of consultation between stakeholders to reimagine meanings and memories, which can take place nationally or regionally. Lincoln and Madgin explain this process in the context of China. They describe it as the ability of heritage to be remolded to reach strategic (policy) objectives through dialogue between stakeholders, in this case encompassing the population and their local government officials.[69] Others corroborate the claim that heritage is remolded like this in dialogue, for purposes such as enhancing local identity, urban development or an urban branding scheme.[70] At least domestically then, the role of the local population is crucial in deriving the meanings of heritage sites and practices. Memories and meanings of heritage are thus constructed and reconstructed through consultation.

However, for China, this ideal process ordinarily does not materialize in practice. Scholars argue that the Chinese population is often omitted from dialogue about heritage for official recognition and registration.[71] Bortolotto et al. illustrate this by arguing that China knows UNESCO's requirements so well that Chinese officials are able to circumvent the community participation criterion to make it appear as though locals are involved, when in reality they are not. This illusion is created by assigning protective units locally and centrally, and while local constituents provide information for the nomination when requested, central constituents do the bulk of the work remotely.[72] Since the Chinese state is able to prove

[66] Aygen and Logan, "Heritage in," 415-416, 421; Ludwig and Walton, "Afterword: Historicizing," 299-302; Ludwig and Walton, "Introduction: (Un)Authorised," 16; Shepherd, "UNESCO and," 250; Shepherd, "Cultural Heritage," 55, 74-75; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 33-34, 47-48.
[67] Lincoln and Madgin, "The Inherent," 949-951; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 44, 64-66.
[68] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 44, 64-66.
[69] Lincoln and Madgin, "The Inherent," 949-951.
[70] Law, "The Role," 215-218; Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska, "Chinese Destinations," 7598; Swain, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism," 47.
[71] Bortolotto et al., "Proving participation," 72-73; Svensson and Maags, "Mapping the," 19-20; Zhao, "Local versus," 74.
[72] Bortolotto et al., "Proving participation," 72-73.

participation of represented communities even when outside communities take the helm, and to restrict the involvement of represented communities, it follows that it is possible for China to portray heritage practices in a manner that does not correspond with the meanings of heritage for local populations.

Acknowledging that states can utilize heritage for their own objectives in this way raises concerns about the neutrality, genuineness and trustworthiness of heritage nominations to UNESCO. In general, authenticity is an important criteria for heritage sites to qualify as UNESCO World Heritage. However, in the context of state parties having their own agendas for heritage, the authenticity of their UNESCO heritage nominations themselves can be at stake. Since politics is in intertwined in heritage, heritage cannot be seen separately from political aims. This is particularly true for nominations. The influence of states, their financial contributions, the proof for the participation of involvement of local actors in heritage preservation are all factors that are involved in the nomination process and affect the genuineness of heritage nominations.

China, as a UNESCO state party, holds a great deal of the total of UNESCO's cultural heritage and is its largest donor. China has the second highest number of inscribed tangible heritage sites and the highest number of inscribed intangible heritage elements. China currently has 57 World Heritage sites, surpassed only by Italy with 59 World Heritage sites, and closely followed by France and Germany with both 52 sites.[73] At present, China has 43 elements on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, with a significant lead over the country with the second most, Türkiye with 30.[74] Furthermore, Meskell et al. show that between 2003 and 2013, 94% of China's nominations were inscribed on the World Heritage List.[75] Meskell et al. discuss that China invests large sums of money into its nomination files and that, in turn, the country has a high chance to secure enlistment.[76] China also provides the largest financial contribution of all UNESCO state parties, transcending the second largest contribution by Italy with over 25 million USD.[77] China is for example funding the "UNESCO Silk Roads Programme"[78] as one of the projects this money is spent on. This UNESCO project runs culturally parallel to China's independent economic Belt and Road Initiative. US officials have expressed concerns about the increasing power of China in UNESCO, but whether China's position has manifested illicitly

[73] UNESCO World Heritage Convention, "World Heritage."
[74] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Browse the."
[75] Meskell et al., "Multilateralism and," 433.
[76] Meskell et al., "Multilateralism and," 428.
[77] UNESCO Core Data Portal, "Sources of."
[78] UNESCO Silk Roads Programme, "The UNESCO."

is unsubstantiated.[79] The numbers do show that China is actively involved in UNESCO. Nonetheless, China has not breached UNESCO's rules.

2.3 Competing over the Ownership of Heritage

If countries can genuinely or disingenuously use heritage for their own strategic goals, this can impact both the relations between countries and what practices countries want to nominate to UNESCO. For example, Lixinski and Tomczak explain that South Korea's nomination of the Gangneung Danoje festival in 2005 motivated the Chinese government to nominate the Dragon Boat festival. The Gangneung Danoje festival was inscribed as a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, sparking anger in Chinese media. While Yan argues that these festivals are distinct, the Chinese media felt that South Korea encroached upon and appropriated their culture.[80] Goossaert and Palmer describe a similar incident between South Korea and China for Confucianism.[81] China, India, Japan and South Korea are also all devising UNESCO nominations on tai chi or Tibetan medicinal science, or both.[82] It appears that more international battles over the ownership of heritage are imminent, especially in East Asia.[83]

Cases of Chinese ethnicities' heritage practices show that the effects of these battles are particularly discernable in borderlands. Tomczak argues that the experience of having to "fight for its own heritage" made China realize the advantage of pre-emptively claiming other heritage practices.[84] In doing so, the Chinese government has focused on nominating its ethnic groups' intangible heritage practices to UNESCO. Perhaps as a result, China nominated the Manas epic for its Kyrgyz minority, which was inscribed on UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* in 2009.[85] Jacquesson even explains China's motivation for claiming Kyrgyz heritage as a form of "new cultural imperialism."[86] She argues that the 2010s' "Manas mania"[87] in Kyrgyzstan was fueled by anxiety over China appropriating Kyrgyz culture as its national heritage. Eventually, Kyrgyzstan attained a separate inscription for the Manas epic as World Heritage of Kyrgyzstan. However, for the local population, the scramble centered more on proving on what side of the border the oldest version originated than

[79] Charlton and Lee, "US decides."
[80] Lixinski, "A Tale," 1; Tomczak, "Is China," 312-313; Yan, "World Heritage," 230.
[81] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 344.
[82] Tomczak, "Is China," 312-313.
[83] Lee, '*Difficult Heritage,'* 300-301.
[84] Tomczak, "Is China," 313.
[85] Tomczak, "Is China," 313.
[86] Jacquesson, "Claiming heritage," 336.
[87] Jacquesson, "Claiming heritage," 325.

establishing a distinction between Kyrgyz and Chinese versions of the epic on a global level.[88] In a similar context, Wu calls attention to the position of domestic groups in heritage disputes. The status quo of China and Mongolia cooperating on multinational intangible heritage nominations in Inner Mongolia was disrupted when the states failed to reach a shared vision on the nomination of singing technique *khoomei*.[89] Besides the pre-existing territorial border, this disturbance created a supplementary cultural border between China and Mongolia, constituting "an awareness of cultural 'ownership.'"[90] In the situations mentioned above, the issue shifts from which version of the heritage practices has a longer history, to within which country's borders it falls.

Accordingly, countries contending over heritage practices in reality compete about their right to ownership and "authenticity." The issue of who "owns" heritage arises: which country can count it as their heritage and effectively which "nation" it "belongs" to. Yet, from a perhaps romantic perspective, if a practice is that popular and centered around the borders of two or more countries, it seems to be a collective practice of these borderland people, rather than of one state over another. Similarly, for Lixinksi, ownership of intangible heritage is invariably invented. It is impossible to govern the spread of intangible practices, which ignore and transcend a country's borders. Because of this intangible dissemination, it does not make sense for one state to claim ownership over a practice.[91] Nor is there one actor that can be entitled to decide how a practice should be preserved since no one can claim that it "belongs" to their country. As a result, Lixinski also criticizes the existence of the concepts of preservation and authenticity. Indeed, although authenticity is part of the conception of tangible heritage, authenticity has been left out of UNESCO's conception of intangible heritage because of its disputed nature. Despite this absence of authenticity in legislative and defining spheres, countries still speak of authenticity of intangible heritage for political ends.[92] Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska for example illustrate that there is not necessarily concordance between UNESCO's concept of authenticity and local preservation values of intangible heritage. Locally, the commodification of heritage is a natural side effect of China's political system due to the intertwinement of culture and art with politics. Conversely, internationally, commodification is considered to tarnish heritage.[93] Discourse on heritage can harm the

[88] Jacquesson, "Claiming heritage," 325, 328-329.
[89] Wu, "To share," 274-277.
[90] Wu, "To share," 277-278.
[91] Lixinski, "A Tale," 1-2.
[92] Hafstein, "Intangible Heritage," 133; Lixinski, "A Tale," 1-3, 8.
[93] Skowron-Markowska and Nowakowska, "Chinese Destinations," 7598-7599.

relations between countries and peoples, or even prompt conflicts, such as battles over heritage. Thus, authenticity, preservation and ownership of heritage are contested concepts in intangible heritage.

2.4 Conceptual Blurring in Folklore

The way the government frames folk belief in China is crucial to consider its position and that of its practitioners as a result of the uncertainty of whether these practices are (legally) protected. Folk belief in contemporary China holds a contradictory position as a result of an arguably Chinese governmentally imposed hierarchy of religious belief.[94] The definition of folk belief is contested, but it can be differentiated from religion in China in that it is not a centrally organized, but a ubiquitous local phenomenon. Folk is interchangeable with popular in the name of the concept, but the authorities' distinction between religion and belief is less straightforward.[95] In the context of China, Zhou provides a normative reason for speaking of folk religion rather than folk belief. Zhou argues that the term folk religion implies it is legally on equal grounds with religion, whereas the term folk beliefs indicates they are not on equal grounds with religion. Others argue that the distinction between folk belief and folk religion is purely organizational.[96] Nevertheless, scholars agree that folk belief in China has held an ambiguous status since its revival in the 1980s.[97] When convenient for the Chinese regime's legitimacy and economic growth, folk belief is selectively acknowledged and assisted. While believers could prefer folk belief to be considered religion for the legal benefits such as protection that would bring, it appears that the Chinese state prefers to classify folk religion as a cultural practice.

Before 2004, folk belief was not officially acknowledged by the Chinese state at all. Chen explains that, in response to UNESCO's inclusion of intangible cultural heritage in 2003, the Chinese state created its own national inventory of intangible heritage in 2004, encompassing ten categories of preservation. Thenceforth, "Folk belief" has been categorized as a small subcategory in the tenth, last category, named "folk custom," and does not have a category of its own.[98] The development of the subcategory of folk belief hereby indicates some progress in achieving legitimate status in comparison to the five recognized religions. As a result, it is possible to trace a transition from folk belief as a cultural practice to a more

[94] Chen, "For Whom."
[95] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 10; Ku and Hong, "China's influence,"; Zhou, "Folk Belief," 152-156.
[96] Ku and Hong, "China's influence,"; Zhou, "Folk Belief," 157.
[97] Chen, "For Whom," 308-309; Gao, "How does," 557; Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 4; Lai, "The religious," 40; Zhou, "Folk Belief," 155.
[98] Chen, "For Whom," 308-309, 329-330; Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "First Batch."

ambiguous position of folklore as intangible heritage. Thus, in theory, the Chinese state's shift to acknowledge folk belief as intangible cultural heritage indicates it has reorganized its governmental system to accommodate folk belief. However, in practice, "folk belief" still occupies an unacknowledged, somewhat subordinate position compared to religion and other intangible heritage.

Besides questioning the globally dominant conception of intangible heritage, scholars also question the conception of folklore as intangible heritage. Hafstein and Kuutma, for example, explain similar paradoxes regarding the contradictory relation between folklore and intangible heritage. This paradox occurs upon naming folklore as intangible heritage to render it transferable and safeguardable, because that inadvertently reifies richer practices and may lead to heritagization.[99] In addition, Kuutma identifies a cycle of folklorization. Folklorization comes into existence through widespread circulation to familiarize the population with cultural practices. In it, a shift from folklore to intangible heritage occurs out of a desire to safeguard these cultural practices, and a subsequent shift back to folklore eventuates on account of the similarity between methods of capturing and maintaining practices to those that have been used for folklore.[100] Seeing as the conversion and relation between folklore and intangible heritage are two-way, the boundaries between them are blurred. This is also the case in China domestically, where this conceptual blurring can be further refined to the distinction between intangible heritage, "folk belief" and religion.

With heritagization, there is an added layer of complexity to this conceptual blurring. Goossaert and Palmer illustrate that the heritagization of folk religion occupies a "gray area"[101] and designate it as not quite religion. They argue that this heritagizational process falls in the middle of the spectrum of religion in China, with at one side the state's designation of official religions, and at the other the state's "adversaries" that employ religion out of political purposes.[102] Falun Gong is an example of one of these branded adversaries.[103] In this way, the Chinese government does not consider folk religion a threat. The most recent trend in Chinese governmental policy has seen the rendering of folk religion as living heritage practices.[104]

[99] Hafstein, "Intangible Heritage," 134; Kuutma, "From Folklore," 52.
[100] Hafstein, "Intangible Heritage," 127; Kuutma, "From Folklore," 52.
[101] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 342.
[102] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 342.
[103] Herzfeld, *Subversive Archaism*, 8; Kindopp, "China's War," 259.
[104] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 343-344.

2.5 Conclusion

States manage heritage strategically. This is because culture, politics, history, economy and society are intertwined in national and international heritage. While controlling heritage is at variance with UNESCO's purpose of recording representative heritage, a state's national objectives in controlling heritage does not necessarily conflict with UNESCO's requirements. China has embraced globally dominant heritage practices and has masterfully adapted to exploit their limits. Consequently, the Chinese government domestically and internationally utilizes cultural heritage politically, societally and economically.

That countries can strategically manage heritage in turn raises concerns about the authenticity of heritage nominations themselves. Heritage is constantly reimaged, and can also be remolded into something it is not. Thus, state parties can concoct their heritage in a way that appeals to UNESCO officials, particularly as part of their heritage strategies. There are also ways to exert influence on the likelihood of the inscription of a country's nominations. Through the involvement of represented communities and amount of inscriptions as UNESCO heritage, the Chinese government has demonstrated its ability and ambition to frame local values in such a way that they align with UNESCO's values and criteria.

Countries' heritage strategies can impact each other in terms of international relations and what countries want to nominate as World Heritage at UNESCO. Consequently, more competition over the ownership of heritage is likely to occur. This is particularly true for borderlands, where heritage is oftentimes shared amongst peoples in different countries, yet only attributed to one state. This reveals the issue of which country holds a heritage practice in its borders. Indeed, the heritage concepts of ownership, preservation and authenticity are contested for intangible heritage.

Scholars question the conception of folklore as intangible heritage in that the conceptual demarcations between folklore and intangible heritage are unclear. The way in which the Chinese government frames folk belief is important. Within China, this can be remodeled to the conceptual overlap between folklore, intangible heritage and religion. The Chinese state's most recent, preferred method of framing folk belief is to render it as living heritage practices, that is, as intangible heritage. Hence, the Chinese government prefers to classify folk religion as an heritage practice and thus culture rather than religion.

It follows that there has to be a strategic purpose behind China's nominations for UNESCO World Heritage. This is particularly true for the Dragon Boat festival, Qiang New Year festival and Mazu beliefs and customs because, as practices containing elements of

religious folk beliefs, their acknowledgement is a sensitive issue for the Chinese government. It is thus likely that evidence of these underlying objectives can be found in the nomination files of these cases.

3. Methodology

In order to determine what the Chinese state utilizes the nomination of what can be considered practices with popular religious elements for, the nomination files of the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs, and the Qiang New Year festival will be critically examined. This thesis will focus on disentangling the Chinese Communist Party's narrative rather than analyzing power structures between religious communities and the Chinese government that may be reflected in the text of the nomination files.[105] As such, I will employ discourse analysis rather than critical discourse analysis. In doing so, the nomination files' language, their content and their presentation of folk belief will be considered.

UNESCO nomination files include a nomination form, the consent of communities, a ten-minute video, ten pictures, and potential supplementary materials.[106] These supplementary materials are not always made public, whereas other components of nominations files are. The nomination form follows a standard UNESCO blueprint that explains how the practice meets each criteria. The consent of communities for intangible heritage nominations constitutes signed letters from representative community members, groups or individuals to demonstrate that "The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation … and with their free, prior and informed consent."[107] According to Bortolotto et al., no specific explanation exists for this community criterium so that state parties' perceptions and conceptions on what exactly it entails and how to prove that this is applicable differ.[108] As a result, the number of letters and who sign are at the discretion of state parties. In addition, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage that decides whether a nomination is inscribed records and publicizes the reason for its decision.[109] While not a component of UNESCO nomination files, the decision of the Committee can uncover what criteria the nominations most successfully fulfilled. More recent occurrences as well as any contradictions between governmental practice and policy and can also be elucidated by detailing developments in the practices after 2009 outside of the nomination files.

However, even though heritage, and UNESCO-registered heritage in particular, are used as political instruments, it may be more than difficult to regulate how other, non-state actors interpret heritage accounts. Government officials may frame heritage in a state-approved storyline, but they cannot guarantee locals, visitors or other interpreters will understand heritage

[105] Van Dijk, "Critical discourse analysis," 466.
[106] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Procedure of."
[107] Bortolotto et al., "Proving participation," 69-70.
[108] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 30-31, 144.
[109] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 126.

in this predetermined, preferred manner. Thus, Yan and Shepherd argue it is impossible to manage how visitors perceive heritage elements or practices.[110] Furthermore, the consent of communities, which encompasses seven letters for the Dragon Boat festival, fifty-eight for Mazu belief and customs and twenty-three for the Qiang New Year festival, are not all available in English. While the letters for the Qiang New Year festival are provided in both Chinese and English, those for the Dragon Boat festival are partly available in English and the letters for Mazu belief and customs are only provided in Chinese. Therefore, to the extent that it is fruitful to determine whether the description in the nomination form matches the underlying beliefs of the groups involved in the consent of communities, an insufficient command of Chinese makes it impossible for all of the Dragon Boat festival and Mazu belief and customs' letters to be examined here. It is possible to consider the letters for the Qiang New Year festival, and partly for the Dragon Boat festival, although it remains to be seen how much communities expand on their explanation and interpretation of what the practice entails. As a result, the findings of this research could be limited by an unintentionally subjective or incomplete interpretation of the nomination files.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned literature, the following factors are important to consider for this research. The first point of interest in the nomination files will be the language that is used. According to Hevia, states neutralize nominations from political or other objectives through the use of inclusive, unifying and cultural pluralist language.[111] This presents a common "nation" and delegitimizes any calls for secession. The second regards the content of the nomination files. Identifying to what extent locals were involved in negotiating the meaning of heritage can be assessed by considering the consent of communities. Following Lixinski's argument on the non-existence of authenticity for national and UNESCO-based intangible heritage, it is likely that the mentioning of authenticity in nomination files is politically motivated.[112] It is also pertinent to see whether these heritage nomination files are used to convey an overarching, national narrative. Additionally, in the case presented here, the ways in which the state can be seen to be tolerant or intolerant towards cultural pluralism in the files is an important consequence in the Chinese state's motivation for the utilization of folk religion as intangible heritage. The third and final point of interest relates specifically to the presentation, or even categorization, of folk belief implicit in the nomination files. The question is whether popular religious elements are presented as a commodity, cultural practice, religion or heritage.

[110] Shepherd, "UNESCO and," 252; Yan, "The making," 584, 598.
[111] Hevia, "World Heritage, National," 220-221, 224.
[112] Lixinski, "A Tale," 2, 8.

The absence of religion in UNESCO's intangible heritage framework and the Chinese governmental policy on religious belief means that this classification has implications for the motivation of the government if it is mentioned. Furthermore, the threat of heritage alteration or impairment lurks in this presentation due to whether the practices are misrecognized or commodified. Overall, elucidating the goals of these nominations through these three point of interests are the main purpose in examining the UNESCO nomination files.

Thus, this thesis will analyze the discourse of the nomination forms, videos, consent of communities letters where possible, committee's decision and more recent developments to determine how the Chinese state brands religious practices in an international context.

4. The Dragon Boat Festival Nomination File

The Committee approved the nomination form for the Dragon Boat festival for inscription in the summer of 2009. The form encompasses seven pages of information about the festival, how it qualifies as intangible cultural heritage and why it should be inscribed. The video takes eight minutes to do likewise.

4.1 Nomination Form

According to the nomination form, "The [Dragon Boat] festival is an intangible cultural heritage with unique cultural connotations of the Chinese nation."[113] Besides this instance, "the Chinese nation" is invoked multiple times throughout the form as recurring theme. Through the Chinese governmental measure that is aimed at "protect[ing] the festival [to] exert its positive role in enhancing the cohesion and the belonging of the Chinese people,"[114] the festival is ascribed a community-building and enhancing function. Furthermore, the form presents the Dragon Boat festival as a practice of most if not all Chinese ethnicities in stating that "the Han nationality, some minority nationalities … as well as overseas Chinese celebrate the festival."[115] This similarly suggests that Chinese ethnicities are united in their common celebration of this festival. In order to demonstrate the involved communities' consent of its nomination, the nomination form also asserts "the Dragon Boat Festival is shared by more than a billion [Chinese people],"[116] which is the majority of the Chinese population. Through the cohesive discourse regarding celebrators, the festival is characterized as a practice that unifies all Chinese people, including most Chinese ethnic groups and overseas Chinese, while the control of its content is centralized.

Despite the Chinese government's One-China principle, Taiwan is not explicitly mentioned as part of "the Chinese nation" that celebrates the Dragon Boat festival in the nomination file.[117] Conversely, the form refers to mainland China twice. As the form states, "The Dragon Boat Festival spreads from the Mainland of China to other regions where overseas Chinese are living,"[118] it could indicate that the festival disseminated to Taiwan. Thus, the form presents dragon boat racing as having originated in mainland China, and disseminating from there to places where overseas Chinese are living. Places considered Greater China, like Hong

[113] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[114] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 5.
[115] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 1-2.
[116] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 5.
[117] Wei, "Some Reflections."
[118] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.

Kong and Taiwan, where the festival is also celebrated, are not mentioned in the nomination file.[119] This makes it seem as if Taiwan is excluded from the nomination. As a result, whether the Dragon Boat festival constitutes "Taiwanese" heritage thus remains opaque in the nomination file. In speaking of "mainland China," the nomination excludes Taiwan from a Chinese nation.

Furthermore, in speaking of overseas Chinese, the form's content implies the celebration of the Dragon Boat festival transcends borders. The Chinese government makes a claim to the ownership of this intangible heritage festival in stating that: "The festival spread to [the] Korean peninsula, Japan, Vietnam and some … Southeastern Asian countries which Chinese inhabit."[120] Versions of this festival are indeed celebrated in these countries today as national holidays. The Korean version of the Dragon Boat festival, Dano, originated in China but adapted in Korea's different cultural and national contexts, creating distinct festivities.[121] Likewise, in Japan, the Dragon Boat festival developed independently from China. It started as a celebration known as Women's Day, whereafter its name changed multiple times. It turned into Men's Day, then Boys' Day, and finally integrated with Girls' Day as Children's Day in 1948.[122] Correspondingly, the Vietnamese celebrate their version of the Dragon Boat festival, Tet Doan Ngo.[123] Consequently, China's claim to ownership of the festival is independent from Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese cultural practices and as such appears legitimate.

The nomination form of the Dragon Boat festival acknowledges that the festival is celebrated in multiple ways. Festivities centering on historic personages, dragon boats, dragon races, victuals, traditional entertainment and warding off evil are all discussed as characteristic. The form explains that there are regional difference in activities that memorialize Qu Yuan, Wu Zixu, Yan Hongwo and Zhong Kui, mentioning Qu Yuan and Wu Zixu as significant persons for Hubei and Hunan province and Guizhou province respectively. The reason for Wu Zixu's memorialization is explained in the nomination form as follows: "In southeast Guizhou Province a legend goes that an old man was beaten dead when killing a venomous dragon; therefore [Wu Zixu] is memorialized on the Dragon Boat Festival."[124] For Qu Yuan, aside from introducing his personal background and hometown, the form states that "Chinese young people have known about Qu Yuan, a household name, by watching or participating in the celebration

[119] Sofield and Sivan, "From Cultural," 18.
[120] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.
[121] Lixinski, "A Tale," 4.
[122] Qiu and Zhang, "A Study," 25-28, 31.
[123] Avieli, *Rice Talks*, 226.
[124] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.

of the festival. [Qu Yuan] combines love for nation and romanticist poetics, convey[s] a noble sentiment and is, consequently, quite popular with [the] young[er] generation."[125] The nomination form's overview of the celebrations surrounding historical figures thus appears adequate regarding the memorialization of Qu Yuan and Wu Zixu.

However, the nomination form does not describe all historical figures involved in the Dragon Boat festival to the same extent. The figure Zhong Kui is not explained beyond his name, and that people put up his picture. According to Stuart, Zhong Kui became a symbol for fending off evil in Chinese New Year traditions in the tenth century. Subsequently, his popularity flourished throughout the centuries whereby he superseded the centrality of the Taoist Celestial Master in the celebration of the Dragon Boat festival in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Stuart and Schneider argue that the change between yin and yang in China's twenty-four solar terms on the fifth day of the fifth month cause "a dangerous temporary instability"[126] due to threateningly coinciding with the timing of the festival and begot a desire and need to fend off evil for Chinese people.[127] Although the figure of Zhong Kui thus clearly holds exorcist connections, these are not stressed in the nomination. While the form states that the Dai ethnicity honors Yan Hongwo, it remains unclear who they were or what their link to the festival is. In fact, there are few sources on this figure. It seems that Yan overthrew an oppressor in ancient China.[128] Even though Cao E's attempt to save her father from drowning embodies the Chinese ethical ideal of filial piety, she is not mentioned in the nomination at all. Similar to Zhong Kui and Yan Hongwo's incomplete descriptions, her role in the origin of the festival is left out.

In addition to recognizing regional differences in celebrations, the nomination form states that the celebrations of three provinces around the Yangtze river are the most characteristic of the Dragon Boat festival.[129] Yet, the reason for their representativity is scantily explained. The only rationalization is mentioned for Zigui county of Hubei province: "The people there celebrate the festival three times."[130] In this celebration, the festivities are separated into three days. These three days constitute the fifth, fifteenth and twenty-fifth day of the fifth month. The "Double Five" festival, which is how the Dragon Boat festival is also known, hereby becomes an auspiciously planned quadruple festival. In terms of timing, Zigui

[125] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 4.
[126] Stuart, "Timely Images," 320.
[127] Schneider, *A Madman*, 130; Stuart, "Timely Images," 316-321.
[128] Ban, "Dragon boat."
[129] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.
[130] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.

county's celebrations evidently hold more exorcist, and hereby perhaps more traditional, connections than celebrations elsewhere. Furthermore, only two areas are said to construct dragon boats and hold dragon boat races: "Every year [a] dragon race is held in Zigui County and Miluo City."[131] However, while the form does make it appear as such, in reality the races are not exclusive to these locations. They are held in Taiwan, Shanghai, Macao, Hong Kong, where the International Dragon Boat Federation was created, and also worldwide.[132] Nevertheless, the form emphasizes the celebrations of "minority nationalities like Zhuang, Buyi, Dong, Tujia and Gelao."[133] Hereby, the minorities' celebrations are foregrounded over the Han majority. Yet, the form does not explain the celebrations of the Han ethnicity. Despite being introduced as a Han Chinese holiday, the extent to which celebrations of the Han ethnicity overlap with the minor ethnicities' is indeterminable in the nomination form. The nomination file thus fails to explain why these regions are more typical of the Dragon Boat festival's celebration. Instead, this might demonstrate a political motivation to highlight these minorities' celebrations in this case.

The majority of the festival's activities that are detailed in the nomination form describes "folk customs."[134] Even though the content of the form emphasizes the role of historical figures in the summary of the festival, warding off evil is mentioned more in the text and hereby trumps this role thematically. Approached as "Feast,"[135] Dragon Boat festival victuals are presented as snacks in a banquet-like tradition. Nevertheless, as the nomination video reveals, realgar wine and glutinous rice dumplings are ingested to repel illness. Similar to how the victuals are contemporaneously meant to protect the consumers, these dumplings were thrown into the water after Qu Yuan, Wu Zixu and Cao E jumped into a river in order to protect their bodies from being consumed by fish. The food and drinks involved in and consumed for the Dragon Boat festival, that are presented as a celebration in the form, thus have a popular religious origin and exorcist function. Simply describing victuals as components of a feast with a celebratory cultural function downplays the religious origins and meanings thereof.

Besides the exorcist application of the festival's associated victuals, dragon boat races are also uniquely related to folk customs and beliefs. While dragon boat races are presented as a game or sport in a section detailing the festival's celebrations, the origins of holding these

[131] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[132] McCartney and Osti, "From Cultural," 26-27; Sofield and Sivan, "From Cultural," 16; Yuan, "Dragon Boat," 638.
[133] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 1.
[134] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[135] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.

races during the festival are uncertain. Some scholars argue that dragon boat races have a religious origin. For McCartney and Osti and Sofield and Sivan, these origins lie in either a Taoist custom to show devotion to Mazu or a custom to memorialize Qu Yuan.[136] Sofield and Sivan even argue the dragon features were later additions to the races' boats. Both these explanations for the existence of dragon boat races are related to popular beliefs. However, others contest Qu Yuan's involvement in the Dragon Boat festival and the tradition of dragon boat races. Scholars argue that Qu Yuan's persona was an invented myth propelled by the Song dynasty to promote patriotism and loyalty.[137] Chittick discusses that dragon boat races developed into a popular religious tradition from naval force instruction.[138] Considering the uncertain origins of the dragon boat races, the fact that the nomination incorporates it in the titular section "Games and Sporting Races"[139] constitutes a misleading portrayal of the popular religious tradition. Instead, dragon boat races might be more accurately considered a popular religious or folk tradition rather than a sport in the context of the festival's nomination file.

Furthermore, for the purpose of safeguarding the festival, "festival education will be embodied into the national educational system and school curricula."[140] At the same time, the form depicts the festival as a folk practice. This would indicate that familial transmission at home is sufficient for the continuity of the festival, as it has been during the festival's "history of more than 2500 years."[141] Consequently, it is significant that the Chinese government considers it necessary for the festival to be instructed on a national level. By determining the characterization of the festival in the country's education system, the Chinese authorities can centralize the conception and narrative of the festival.

Besides the Chinese nation, another recurring phrase is the invocation of communal harmony, both internally and externally. Within China itself, "[the festival] is also a kind of important resource to construct a harmonious society."[142] As the Dragon Boat festival's nomination dates from 2009, this phrasing suggests a connection to Hu Jintao's primary governmental policy for a "harmonious society" and "harmonious world."[143] Following Deng Xiaoping's and Jiang Zemin's policies, Hu focused on the consequences of a lack of attention towards the social environment, while continuing to drive domestic economic development and

[136] McCartney and Osti, "From Cultural," 26; Sofield and Sivan, "From Cultural," 14-15.
[137] Schneider, *A Madman*, 126-130.
[138] Chittick, "The Song."
[139] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[140] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 4.
[141] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.
[142] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[143] Zheng and Tok, "Harmonious society," 4.

China's more active international stance.[144] Hu was in office between 2002 and 2012, coinciding precisely with UNESCO's initiation of intangible heritage lists in 2003, which led to the establishment of national Chinese inventories and state party nominations of intangible heritage. Writing that "[the festival] helps to communicate between nations and enhance the harmonious interaction of the different peoples that share the culture,"[145] the form also alludes to Hu's external policy of a "harmonious world." The nomination of the Dragon Boat festival, in the perspective of Hu's policy, appears to be the application of heritage to further the goal of a harmonious society.

This harmony discourse is partly applied to satisfy UNESCO criteria. For example, a statement such as "the festival play[s] a very special role in constructing a harmonious society and creating a harmonious environment between man and nature,"[146] indicates that the Dragon Boat festival uniquely furthers co-existence and interchange. This creative and diverse practice also extends to an international context because it is celebrated worldwide and Chinese celebrators allegedly inspire and spread this demeanor wherever they go. This appeals to the list's criterium of "encouraging dialogue, … reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity."[147] Emphasizing the practice's long history and its transgenerational continuity and transmission is similarly a suitable qualification. Furthermore, in order to highlight the involvement and cooperation of local people and governments, the form states that: "province[s] work together to nominate the Dragon Boat Festival as the magnum opus of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Human Beings."[148] Referring to the festival in such a way constitutes resolute phrasing that displays confidence in the applicability of the festival to be World Heritage. Some of the form's text is hence dedicated to World Heritage criteria in a multipurpose manner, partially organically, and partially politically. For the Dragon Boat festival nomination, the Chinese government was evidently able to satisfy UNESCO's requirements while concurrently serving its own political agenda.

4.2 Video

The nomination video follows the configuration of the nomination form, making its content mirror the form's. Differences in format mean that visual and auditorial elements ornament the text devoted to explaining the Dragon Boat festival. The footage used in the video portrays the

[144] Zheng and Tok, "Harmonious society," 4-5.
[145] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[146] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 3.
[147] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Procedure of."
[148] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 5.

customs described. Moreover, the choice of music reveals the narrative of the depicted practices. Three compositions were used as background music. Classical-sounding Chinese music is played during displays of dragon boat races, customs associated with warding off evil, the festival's celebrations at Qu Yuan's hometown and health and entertainment activities.[149] Hollywood style orchestral music adorns the explanation of the festival's origins, exorcist customs and memorializing historical figures.[150] Most significantly, once the endeavors of the Chinese government to safeguard the festival and its activities are narrated, a gentle, sweet melody plays.[151] This has the effect of romanticizing the contributions of the Chinese government. The video thus serves to convey the Chinese government's genuine concern for, respect of and involvement in the festival's activities and their continuity to interpreters.

The video pushes beyond the emphasis on the role of "folk customs" evident in the nomination form. The account that "…folk customs involved in the Dragon Boat Festival have developed from older customs around this season aimed at driving away evil,"[152] implies that the origins of the festival lie in dispelling evil. This would mean that the festival evolved from folk religious traditions. This is affirmed later in video with the following statement: "[The Dragon Boat festival] has become an indispensable part of the Chinese folk calendar."[153] By admitting that the festival has a place in this calendar, the Dragon Boat festival is indicated to be a folk festival. The Chinese government thus conveys that the festival is a folk practice in the video. Hereby, the Chinese government recognizes the Dragon Boat festival's origins in religious folk customs, including its exorcist practices.

Similar to the form as cited earlier, the video again mentions the festival's "abundant connotations which have deep influence on the lives of Chinese people."[154] Yet what these connotations exactly entail is unclear. Perhaps these allude to how the Dragon Boat festival contributes to "forge a sense of fellowship"[155] among celebrators. This idea of a community is also emphasized through the festival's "unique role in helping to create a harmonious social environment…"[156] The video further mentions that the Dragon Boat festival fosters a connection between humans and nature, hereby bolstering its chances for inscription according to the diversity criterion. At the same time however, indicating that the festival enhances "local

[149] Taylor, "The Rise of China."
[150] Atmajian, "Coming of Age."
[151] Chou, "Autumn in the North Sea Park."
[152] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[153] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[154] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[155] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[156] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."

and national pride"[157] and "serves to enhance coherence of social groups and sectors through a strengthening of cultural identity,"[158] attaches a more explicit political dimension to the video. As a result, its conclusion that "… it has become an irreplaceable cultural symbol of the Chinese nation"[159] takes on a different meaning. This statement results in a narrative in which the festival takes on an unmissable and consolidating role. Instead of expressing an exemplar that carries cultural connotations, the festival becomes a political ideal that propagates the idea of one, unified China.

The video is also used as a visual means of conforming to UNESCO criteria. For instance, multiple generations are shown to participate in the festival's customs. This communicates the continued importance and transmission of celebratory activities. The video also illustrates the spontaneous poetic gatherings of farmers in Zigui county in more detail. Their imagination and independent organization speaks to UNESCO's creativity criterium. Lastly, elaborated references to folk customs to ward off illness, natural disasters and evil spirits further appeal to the uniqueness and diversity of human traditions.[160] In this way, the Chinese government appeals to folk customs to suggest the festival of being warranted as UNESCO-recognized heritage.

4.3 Consent of Communities

Five identical English letters were signed by representatives of the festival. These groups give their voluntary agreement and consent to have the Dragon Boat festival "included … as rnagnum opus of the UN Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,"[161] and speak on behalf of people that celebrate the festival. Two more letters are entirely in Chinese. The names of the signatories of these seven letters are solely provided in Chinese. In comparison to the aforementioned claim that over one billion Chinese celebrate the festival, it is modest that only seven letters were submitted for the approval of communities criterion.

4.4 Committee Decision

The Committee expounded their premise for deciding to inscribe the festival during the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for The Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural

[157] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[158] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[159] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[160] Beijing Music Floated Culture Communication Limited, "The Dragon."
[161] China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Center, "Consent of Communities," 1-5.

Heritage. Their decision emphasizes the "harmony,"[162] "social cohesion"[163] and "cultural identity"[164] promoted by the practice as elements that accredited the Dragon Boat festival to stand out as World Heritage. The incorporation of the festival and its activities into the national school curriculum also appealed to the Committee, as they argue the festival's "educational activities"[165] contribute to the safeguarding of the festival and its activities.[166] Regarding the involvement of communities, the Committee concludes that "The festival was nominated with the involvement of communities … and consent has been given on behalf of the communities concerned."[167] The Committee thus does not question the small amount of submitted letters.

4.5 Developments after Inscription

The final scene of the nomination video shows the Quzi temple in Miluo. According to Qu Yuan's tale, he committed suicide in Miluo river. Consequently, the Quzi temple is popular for memorializing Qu Yuan.[168] However, in recent years, the city has tried to attract more visitors by advertising the farmers' poetic gatherings, staging an opera dedicated to Qu Yuan in collaboration with Beijing-based educational institutes, organizing lectures and creating a cultural park and more infrastructure to ensure accessibility.[169] Claims that "one can also take part in events along the Miluo River, where Qu drowned himself"[170] and that "The area is ideal for those who want to leave behind a city life for a while and recharge their batteries,"[171] embody a narrative that presents Miluo as a touristic attraction for its culture and remoteness compared to urban areas. The developments in the area are not merely local governmental initiatives, as Beijing institutes were involved such as in the operatic interpretation of Qu Yuan's story. Thus, the Chinese authorities play an important role in the commodification of Miluo and its traditions, which could threaten the Dragon Boat festival's integrity as depicted in the practice's nomination file.

[162] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[163] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[164] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[165] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[166] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[167] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.12*.
[168] The People's Government of Yueyang City, "Duanwu Customs."
[169] An. "Quzi cultural,"; Feiyue Yang and Zhiwei Feng, "Miluo offers."
[170] Yang and Feng, "Miluo offers."
[171] Yang and Feng, "Miluo offers."

4.6 Findings

In ignoring the actualities of the festival's nomination the Chinese government is able to centralize control over the conception of the Dragon Boat festival. These actualities include the inconsistent mention of memorialized historical figures, the origins of the dragon boat races, the origins of the festival's victuals, the small number of representatives that consented of the nomination, the potentially commodifying advertisements of Miluo's festival, the contradiction between characterizing the festival as a folk tradition whilst not mentioning its popular religious connotations and the portrayal of the festival as political ideal in the shape of a harmonious Chinese nation. Hereby presenting the Dragon Boat festival as intangible heritage concurrently allows the Chinese government to diminish its popular religious origins. Instead of a practice to ease the minds and fortune of Chinese people, it becomes a varied cultural festival that can represent Chinese people on an international stage.

5. The Mazu Belief and Customs Nomination File

Compared to the Dragon Boat festival nomination file, the nomination file for Mazu belief and customs is larger. Also approved for inscription in the summer of 2009, the nomination form has eleven pages and a ten-minute video.

5.1 Nomination Form

The nomination explicitly takes the risk of commodification into account through the following protective measure: "Limit tourists' access into the key areas of the heritage [to] ensure the Mazu Belief and Customs can be passed down in a pleasant cultural and ecological environment."[172] Furthermore, another measure aims at the continuity of Mazu worship by explaining that "[the government] will also devote manpower and technical resources to make sure these activities of Mazu belief and customs can be conducted in a conventional way."[173] Likewise, the form states that "procedures of travel preparation … must be strictly followed,"[174] regarding the Mazu statue's excursion. Combined with the measures aiming at the "appropriate" and "conventional" milieu for Mazu belief and customs to be passed down, this indicates the Chinese government's inflexible attitude toward the realization and preservation of Mazu worship. The Chinese government also argues that "managers of … Mazu palaces and temples should mobilize the believers to actively participate in relevant activities and protect the Mazu belief and customs"[175] in the nomination form. With these measures, the Chinese government warrants active involvement, even mobilization, not only of Mazu believers and followers, but also of non-followers. It thus appears that there is only one right interpretation of Mazu belief and customs for the Chinese state, which is the one presented to UNESCO in this nomination.

The nomination form emphasizes Meizhou island as the place where Mazu worship originated, calling the temple devoted to Mazu on the island "the First Mazu Temple"[176] further empowers Mazu worship on Meizhou island. Chiang argues that the Chinese government controls the hierarchy of temples devoted to Mazu through presenting Meizhou island as the core of Mazu belief and customs.[177] It is true that the First Mazu Temple is mentioned numerous times, while other temples are only summarized once and otherwise referred to as "divisional

[172] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 7.
[173] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."
[174] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 8.
[175] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6.
[176] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 2.
[177] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 15.

temples"[178] or "palaces."[179] The only other temple to be mentioned repeatedly, three times altogether, is Tianjin city's Heavenly Empress Palace. Moreover, as the form states that "heritors have been selected from Putian City to pass on knowledge and skills,"[180] this presumably means that the only accredited transmitters of Mazu belief and customs are in Fujian province. Meizhou island actors are also the sole participants in the founding of an organization to protect Mazu belief and customs and involved in the action plan to safeguard it.[181] The form presents Mazu belief and customs as a practice that transcends borders. Theoretically then, Mazu worship in other parts of China and in other countries should also be preserved by means of the proposed measures. Nevertheless, as measures that ought to protect and preserve the practices in its entirety, the protective measures that center on a specific area in Fujian province are skewedly distributed.

Furthermore, it is striking that the Mazu belief and customs nomination form refers to UNESCO intangible cultural heritage as "World Non-Material Cultural Heritage."[182] 2009 was the first year for China to nominate practices for UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage lists, and twenty-five of China's nominations were approved for inscription. The term Non-Material Cultural Heritage was used three times in two other nomination files of 2009, namely those for Chinese paper-cut and the traditional handicrafts of making Xuan paper. However, it was used to describe Chinese governmental notices on and research institutes for intangible heritage, and the nomination forms otherwise simply use intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, the context and infrequency of its use suggests the divergence in these two files is not purposive but due to a translation slip. Considering that out of these twenty-five, only the Mazu belief and customs file uses the term World Non-Material Cultural Heritage, it seems odd that a different term is adopted here instead of intangible cultural heritage, which has become the conventional international term. The abundant use of "intangible cultural heritage" in the other twenty-four nomination files of 2009 demonstrates the Chinese government's awareness of the application and prevalence of the conventional international term, and thus suggests a motive for the use of a different term exists.

A possible explanation for this divergence arises from Chiang's argument, in which translation is seen as an element of cultural politics and illustrates that mainland China and Taiwan use different Chinese words for intangible cultural heritage. She explains that this

[178] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 1.
[179] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 1.
[180] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6.
[181] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6.
[182] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 7.

divergence emanates from Japan's imperial occupation of Taiwan during which the concept of intangible cultural heritage materialized. According to Chiang, the standard terminology is simply "intangible cultural heritage" in mainland China, whereas in Taiwan it is literally "non-physical cultural assets."[183] In the Mazu belief and customs nomination form, on the one hand, "intangible cultural heritage" is used only three times. One of these is used to describe the Chinese body regarding intangible cultural heritage and the other two stem from UNESCO's template itself. Conversely, Non-Material Cultural Heritage is used thirteen times. For instance, the Mazu belief and customs nomination form speaks of "China's Protection Center of Non-Material Cultural Heritage,"[184] whereas the Dragon Boat festival nomination form uses "China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center"[185] instead. Even the 2003 Convention itself is translated in a different manner than usual for the Mazu belief and customs nomination form, namely as "Convention on the Protection of Non-Material Cultural Heritage"[186] instead of "Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage."[187] Furthermore, the idea for the submission of a nomination for Mazu worship was conceived at a conference in Taiwan.[188] Consequently, it is possible that a different English translation was chosen for this nomination due to the integration of the different Taiwanese Mandarin and Standard Mandarin terms for intangible cultural heritage. As a result, the use of a different, uncommon expression in the nomination file might indicate the nomination derives from a Taiwanese initiative.

Despite describing Mazu belief and customs' transboundary, international reach, the nomination form solely acknowledges the practice as Chinese heritage since no other state parties participated in the practice's application. In fact, the form sheds light on which internal actor takes credit for the suggestion to nominate Mazu worship. According to Chiang, Zhenlan temple in Taiwan ushered in the idea to nominate Mazu belief and customs at a conference in 2006. Not only could the local Dajia county government benefit from this initiative by attracting attention to Dajia as a touristic site, but the initiative also aided the goal of designating the temple as central for Mazu worship in Taiwan.[189] The form acknowledges the role of Mazu believers and followers themselves: "Over the years, Mazu palaces and temples and Mazu believers have requested several times on various occasions … to expedite the application."[190]

[183] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 3-7.
[184] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 8.
[185] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 5.
[186] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 2.
[187] The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, *The Dragon*, 2.
[188] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 13-14.
[189] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 13-14.
[190] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 8.

With this phrasing, it seems that followers were the ones to push for nomination of the practice in 2006. However, the form also states that "The Regulatory Committee of Meizhou Island and the Board of Directors of the First Mazu Temple of Meizhou established an application agency and launch[ed] the application process in an effective matter,"[191] which credits mainland China, and Meizhou island in particular, as the enablers of safeguarding Mazu belief and customs. The statements in the nomination form hereby give the impression that the Chinese government received the support of Mazu believers and followers only after initiating a nomination.

Considering that the initiative may have sprouted in Taiwan raises the question of why Meizhou island, as the place where Mazu belief and customs originated, was not the first to come forward with a proposal to nominate the practice to UNESCO. A possible explanation can be found in the diverging historical trajectories of religious belief in mainland China and Taiwan. These trajectories differed as a result of political developments and reforms.[192] Since the Chinese Communist Party became the prevailing party in 1949, mainland China's ruling regime was less tolerant of religious beliefs. While religious belief was discouraged countrywide, this does not mean its non-religious standards were upheld. In practice, religiosity still materialized locally. At the same time, the Chinese Nationalist Party's non-religious policies were not as stern in Taiwan.[193] Consequently, Chiang argues that Mazu belief was more prominent in Taiwan than in mainland China in the twentieth century, and was later reinvigorated in mainland China.[194] Allio similarly argues that Taiwanese followers visibly rekindled Mazu worship in mainland China in the 1980s, boosting stability in cross-strait relations.[195] It may thus be due to the more rooted position of Mazu worship in Taiwan that a Mazu temple there proposed to nominate the belief.

The comparatively recent renewal in mainland China may have impacted the presentation of Mazu belief and customs in the narrative of the nomination form. According to scholars such as Ku and Hong, Mazu belief is a folk religion. In the nomination form, the Chinese government identifies Mazu belief and customs as a "form of social practice, ceremonies and festive activities"[196] in UNESCO's framework and defines it as follows: "the Mazu belief and customs is a folk culture dedicated to worship and praise [of] Mazu's grace, benevolence and philanthropy, with Mazu palaces and temples as the major venue of various

[191] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 8.
[192] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 229.
[193] Goossaert and Palmer, "Religious Question," 215-216, 229, 236-237.
[194] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 13.
[195] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 117-118.
[196] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 3.

activities, and manifested in relevant customs, temple fairs and folktales."[197] This presents Mazu worship as a cultural phenomenon. The claim that Mazu belief and customs constitutes "a valuable mixture of the ocean culture, folk belief and folk culture,"[198] takes a similar cultural approach. The nomination form also portrays Mazu worship as culture by naming an existing "Academy of Mazu Culture."[199] At the same time, believers and followers' "worship and praise of Mazu's grace, benevolence and philanthropy" suggests a degree of glorification of the figure of Mazu as patron. While the form thus approaches Mazu belief as a folk culture, its definition still connotates idolization and religious practices. Evidently, the perspective the Chinese government promotes is that of Mazu belief and customs as an aspect of culture rather than (folk) religion.

The nomination form mentions multiple practices to venerate the goddess that involve pilgrimage. At least three journeys are warranted specifically for temple officials. First, the form states that new-found temples devoted to Mazu all have to participate in an "Incense Ceremony" at Meizhou island's temple and representatives deliver the resulting ashes to the new temple. Chiang indeed argues that this "dividing incense ritual"[200] has religious connotations.[201] This is particularly true considering every newly established temple has to partake in such a ceremony. Second, equivalent to a child returning to their parental house now and then, divisional temples will regularly visit Meizhou island's temple. Fortune-telling methods determine the best timing for delegates to visit Meizhou island's temple. Third, the main statue of Mazu, which resides on Meizhou island, journeys to other Mazu temples for the "Mazu excursion" tradition. Temple officials accompany its travels. Consequently, temples and temples officials that do not abide by these customs will not be identified or recognized as official Mazu temples by existing Mazu temples and UNESCO. Furthermore, voluntary journeys can attract followers and believers to a museum and exhibition center dedicated to Mazu on Meizhou island.[202] The fact that Ku and Hong even speak of Mazu "pilgrim mobilization"[203] indicates the large role pilgrimage plays for Mazu worship in general. Through these customs and organizations, Mazu worship fosters a connection between people. As the form states, "The Mazu belief and customs has become

[197] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 3.
[198] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 5.
[199] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 7.
[200] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 15.
[201] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 15.
[202] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu,"; China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6-7, 9.
[203] Ku and Hong, "China's influence," 249.

… a public sign of cultural identity."[204] Therefore, it seems that these pilgrimage practices also boost a sense of unity or community in the shape of a Chinese nation.

The entanglement of Mazu believers and followers with a Chinese nation through pilgrimage practices particularly calls upon Taiwan's significance to the practice. Several scholars and journalists argue that the cooperation between mainland China and Taiwan in religious exchanges and dissemination of Mazu belief and customs constitutes a Chinese governmental instrument to foster unification.[205] A possible illustration of this is that the nomination form describes the nucleus of Mazu belief and customs as follows: "Meizhou Island of Putian City in Fujian Province is located at the Meizhou Bay in the central part of the west bank of the Taiwan Strait."[206] The location of Meizhou Island could have been phrased differently, for instance as off the coast of Fujian province, to the southeast of mainland China. Such phrasing would have contributed to the closer involvement of mainland China in Mazu worship. Instead, Taiwan becomes enmeshed in the nucleus not only by proximity but also by being named adjacent to mainland China. Furthermore, measures to protect and preserve Mazu belief and customs proposed in the nomination even include an annual seminar that is called "Meizhou Mazu, Cross-Strait Forum."[207] Thus, Taiwan's involvement in Mazu belief and customs may be instrumentalized for a territorial claim.

Mazu belief and customs may similarly constitute an instrumentalized form of Mazu belief itself. The form stating that "gradually Mazu culture has become conventional belief and customs,"[208] implies that Mazu worship is widespread and common. However, from the perspective of the state that does not recognize popular religious religion, Mazu "folk religion" is actually non-mainstream and retains an outsider's position. The nomination file never invokes Mazu worship as a constituent in Buddhist or Taoist traditions. Consequently, from the perspective of Mazu belief and customs as folk religion, it would be difficult to argue that Mazu worship is "conventional." Furthermore, the form resolves that "[an] Official government notice should be made to the public, requesting that special customs and practice related to Mazu belief and customs must be respected by all … individuals in dealing with the heritage of Mazu belief and customs,"[209] which indicates that the Chinese government wants followers and believers of Mazu as well as non-followers to respect Mazu belief and customs. Another

[204] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 4.
[205] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 118-119; Rebecca Kanthor, "'She's in,'"; Ku and Hong, "China's influence,"; the Economist, "China hopes."
[206] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 2.
[207] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6.
[208] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 3.
[209] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 9.

opportunity for governmental control of the image of Mazu worship presents itself through national education in the nomination form: "text[books] on Mazu culture should be further promoted and made accessible in classrooms."[210] The Chinese government taking control of the portrayal of Mazu belief and customs as something important and respectable, is only in line with state policy Mazu worship it is just that, a heritage practice and not an ambiguous "folk belief."

On an international level, the nomination makes use of the long history of Mazu worship, which not only fulfills UNESCO criteria but also attests to China's global position. This can be seen in the form's claim that "The Mazu belief and customs epitomizes China's navigation history since the 10th Century. Mazu palaces and temples are the footprint of China's ships and emigrants."[211] China's maritime legacy is further emphasized by the form stating that "All praiseful titles granted to Mazu by the government are closely related to major navigation and diplomatic events in China."[212] The form subsequently references Zheng He's voyages, invoking the high days of China as a maritime power, and other examples that promote the country's international prestige. Furthermore, the nomination emphasizes the scale of Mazu belief and customs by recounting it has over five thousand temples and palaces worldwide and millions of followers and believers. Similarly, the Chinese authorities lists many regions that are involved in the geographic dissemination of the belief: "China's coastal areas … and other regions and countries with a sizeable Chinese population, such as Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa, the United States, France, Australia, and New Zealand."[213] Therefore, the nomination form can be seen to positively reinforce China's soft power.

These statements related to China's soft power simultaneously satisfy UNESCO's criteria for an intangible cultural heritage practice's continuity. Besides the long history, descriptions of how Mazu belief and customs foster the harmony between humans and nature, love and ecological goals also appeal to UNESCO's criteria. Furthermore, the form reports that "sacrificial ceremonies were listed as national rituals by the government of [the] Qing Dynasty,"[214] already in the eighteenth century. This statement supports the image that the Chinese government has been cultivating the safeguarding of Mazu belief and customs for years on end. The transmission of folk traditions related to Mazu belief and customs also accredits

[210] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 7.
[211] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 5.
[212] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 5.
[213] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 2.
[214] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 9.

the significance of the practice. Moreover, these ideas involve harmony as well, albeit to a lesser extent than the Dragon Boat festival. The form under consideration emphasizes Mazu belief and custom's "unique role in promoting family harmony, society concord and all-embracing love."[215] These further "promote mutual respect and harmony among individuals, communities and groups."[216] Since the accord relates to individuals, that is, any Mazu followers whether in China or elsewhere, it is again reminiscent of Hu Jintao's policy for a "harmonious society" and "harmonious world." The Chinese state is thus clearly able to use the Mazu belief and customs nomination form multifunctionally, both to bolster its objectives and to fulfill UNESCO's criteria.

5.2 Video

The nomination video's content is similar to the content presented in the nomination form. The opening footage shows "the First Mazu Temple," thus reinforcing its significant position in Mazu belief and customs. There is also an emphasis on pilgrimage activities through the visual representation of the Incense Ceremony and Mazu Excursion involving the statue, for example. Parades and temple fair attendees, worshipping ceremonies and other folk customs are shown as well. Similar to the aforementioned statements of the form that Mazu belief and customs is conventional and should be respected, the video states that "worship of her [has] gradually becom[e] a mainstream belief."[217]

Besides returning as discursive themes, these elements are also reinforced by the auditorial components of the video. Three uncredited instrumental songs are used as background music. A soft, classical composition plays for the personal background of Mazu and the history of her worship. Then a more sharp, piercing tune briefly interposes for the explanation of temple fairs. Lastly, an adventurous, dramatic melody plays during the clarification of the Incense Ceremony and other pilgrimage customs. This song increases in buildup during four points in the video. It first builds up for believers with "Mazu lanterns" during traditional festivals, second with more instruments joining in to sound more dramatic and classical when the practice is described to "have become a connecting tie amongst her followers, they play a unique role in both family, and society harmony, as well as all-embracing love,"[218] third for measures the Chinese government will take to safeguard the practice, and

[215] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 4.
[216] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 5.
[217] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."
[218] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."

fourth for issuing public governmental proclamations for people to respect Mazu worship.[219] The final song climaxes only when the video emphasizes that it is thanks to these governmental measures that "Mazu belief and customs will be inherited in an appropriate cultural and ecological environment."[220] On account of the strategic use of this melody, the Chinese government is portrayed as the "savior" of Mazu heritage.

5.3 Consent of Communities

The consent of represented individuals consists of fifty-eight Chinese letters. There is an English cover letter that states that "It is out of the voluntary intentions and joint participations of our company and all inheritors, who have been informed in advance, that Mazu Belief and Customs would apply for joining the "representative inventory of the intangible cultural heritages of humanity.""[221] The large amount of letters attests to the widespread dissemination and followers' active involvement the form describes. Nevertheless, in her analysis of the content of the Chinese consent letters, Allio is critical of the letters' signatories. Since the majority of the letters is signed by officials, it is debatable whether free, nonofficial groups and individuals were really included on behalf of communities to give consent for the nomination.[222]

5.4 Committee Decision

The Committee explains its reasoning for inscribing Mazu belief and customs in the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for The Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Committee particularly appraises the commitment, and existing and proposed safeguarding measures. Indeed, the safekeeping through environmental and researchable means paints an exhaustive picture of governmental involvement. The Committee is also satisfied with the involvement of communities, groups and individuals represented, to the extent that it states the following: "The nomination was initiated by community organizations, village committees and Mazu temples that participated in the nomination process by providing relevant literature…"[223]

[219] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."
[220] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."
[221] China National Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Center, "Consent of Communities," 1.
[222] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 107-109.
[223] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 13.18*.

5.5 Developments after Inscription

The insistence on harmony returns in the Mazu belief and customs nomination file as both between humans and between humans and nature. The treatment of Mazu followers and non-followers regarding Mazu highlights the transnational prominence of Mazu worship and the significance it holds for people. Mazu statues are receiving exceptional treatment, "the First Mazu Temple's" statue for example flew business class between countries for an exchange Meizhou Temple organized.[224] Two years after that, the Chinese media promotes Mazu as the "Guardian Goddess of the Maritime Silk Road."[225] According to this news coverage, Mazu has a large influence in Asia and beyond. Furthermore, the nomination form mentions cultural and ecological reserves on Meizhou Island as proposed protective measures. The Meizhou Island Ecological Nature Reserve indeed currently covers the entire island and surrounding sea area. A World Bank report identifies spillage of unsafe substances, such as oil, as a potential problem for the wellbeing of the reserve.[226] According to the nomination file, respect for the ocean and ocean life through Mazu worship engendered a voluntary abstinence from fishing around Mazu's birthday. The nomination even argues this voluntary abstinence acts as a ban on fishing with supporting scientific evidence for the prevalence of fish reproduction during those days. Since it is so beneficial for sea life in Meizhou island, patrols to control the upholding of this exemplar were introduced in 2009.[227] More recently, the government is striving to eliminate carbon emissions on the island by 2025.[228] The ecological reserve and harmony between the environment and Mazu followers is invoked to attribute Mazu belief and customs with concordance.

Despite the Chinese government's dedication to safeguarding the continuity of Mazu belief and customs, if the way the government framed the practice opposes its reality, these measures can be impairing. Indeed, recent developments and academia call attention to the potentially harmful consequence of measures. For Chiang, "As rapid globalization, industrialization and urbanization speed up and impact on traditional values, the activity space for Mazu belief and customs has become relatively smaller,"[229] is an understatement for historical governmental interference. Mazu followers faced obstruction of worship activities, suppression of belief and demolition of temples in the twentieth century.[230] In a less destructive

[224] BBC, "Chinese Deities."
[225] Hong, "Mazu: Guardian."
[226] World Bank, *China - Fujian*, 11-12, 33-34.
[227] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu,"; China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 4, 9.
[228] Xinhua, "Across China."
[229] First Mazu Temple of Meizhou, "The Mazu."
[230] Allio, "Matsu Enshrined," 112.

manner, the nomination's proposal "to organize the Tourism Festival of Meizhou Mazu Culture,"[231] is a more recent example of a potentially detrimental measure. The government enlarged the festivities and its contribution for this festival that was previously known as the "Mazu Meizhou festival."[232] If the festival conduces to heightening awareness of Mazu belief and customs, it is a contributive measure. However, this is exactly the type of proposal that can engender touristification and commodification of the practice. Furthermore, while people "are encouraged and supported to carry out activities to protect, inherit and spread national and folk culture in compliance with laws"[233] according to the nomination, they are thus restricted to laws and spreading the heritage in this non-religious framework. Protective measures and contemporary developments in the Chinese government's narrative for Mazu belief and customs hereby results in ambivalent impacts on the wellbeing of the practice.

5.6 Findings

Through the nomination that portrays Mazu belief and customs as folk culture, the Chinese government takes control of and propagates a heritage perspective of Mazu belief and customs over a popular religious one. Even though active involvement is supposedly key in this perspective, the Chinese state appears to have initiated the nomination in the form. The contributions of Mazu followers, particularly in Taiwan, are hereby played down. Evidently, the heritage portrayal is the only appropriate and conventional interpretation of the mainstream practice in the eyes of an inflexible Chinese government.

[231] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 6.
[232] Chiang, "Intangibility re-translated," 16; Lim, "China's Leaders."
[233] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 9.

6. The Qiang New Year Festival Nomination File

As a nomination for the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, the Qiang New Year festival has different criteria to fulfill as endangered intangible cultural heritage than nominations for the regular Representative List. As opposed to the promotion of visibility, awareness and dialogue, the nomination has to include a viability, threat and risk assessment for the festival. The major factor in the Qiang New Year festival's viability assessment is China's May 2008 earthquake.[234] The Qiang people live in the north of Sichuan province, where this earthquake hit. Wenchuan county, one of the main places the Qiang celebrate the Qiang New Year festival, was the epicenter of this natural disaster. While the viability assessment describes the earthquake, it could have more explicitly indicated that the site the Qiang live was the epicenter. Regardless, the Qiang New Year festival nomination file was approved for inscription one year after the earthquake on the Urgent Safeguarding list in the summer of 2009. The form has nine pages and the video is ten minutes.

6.1 Nomination Form

In the form's threat and risk assessment, one of the identified challenges of survival the festival faces is that the leading role of the Shibi shamans of the New Year's ceremonies and rituals is restricted to men. In fact, women are not allowed to participate in worship of the Qiang pantheon at all.[235] In UNESCO's most recent nomination forms for inscription in 2025, gender equality is present as possible ambition that intangible heritage practices can contribute to. At the same time, gender-related roles are also acknowledged and respected as bearer categories in intangible heritage.[236] Therefore, the less important role of women in Qiang people's Shibi is not a detriment to the nomination of the festival for UNESCO's criteria. The viability, threat and risk assessment thus demonstrate that the interaction between people and nature and role of Shibi are integral for the continuation of the Qiang New Year Festival.

Moreover, the form emphasizes not only the role of Shibi for the festival's survival, but also their role for Qiang people in general. For the festival itself, "[a] priest Shibi is the presider of collective rituals of Qiang New Year Festival."[237] It is thus the Shibi's role to oversee the entire festival. This role is so important that the form states that "the Shibi are entrusted with a

[234] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 2, 4.
[235] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 4, 8.
[236] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Urgent Safeguarding," 2; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Representative List," 2-3.
[237] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.

great mission. They are not just commoners, but more importantly transmitters and creators of Qiang traditional culture and folk art."[238] This formulation however can be derogatory for people that are not Shibi. In light of the Qiang ethnicity and culture more generally, the role of Shibi is also significant, as the form states that "Shibi are very important for the appreciation and understanding of the origins and the patterns [of] regulation [for] the transmission of Qiang traditional culture."[239] Shibi are even a means to "perfect the mechanism for transmitting [the] Qiang New Year Festival."[240] Furthermore, they are the topic of the first proposed protective measure and the first objective towards protecting the festival by assisting "inheritors," who cultivate the transmission of a practice. For the Qiang New Year festival, a Qiang, provincial and national committee jointly designate these inheritors.[241] It therefore seems that the festival and Qiang culture could not be preserved were it not for the existence of Shibi.

However, passages from the form present Shibi as separate from inheritors. This can be seen in sentences such as "The priests Shibi and major inheritors, including …,"[242] "trainings will be held [by] periodically inviting priests Shibi and major inheritors as the lecturer[s],"[243] and in "Representative inheritors of Qiang New Year Festival will be consulted to identify venues that need restoration or consolidation, and priests Shibi will be invited to redecorate and restore the venues in traditional ways."[244] The inclusion of Shibi as designated inheritors would have contributed to the continuity in knowledge transmission of the Qiang pantheon and religious traditions. While Shibi are not excluded from having a role in the festival's preservation, the ambitious goal of perfecting the festival's transmission will be harder to reach without their active role as inheritors in newly proposed protective measures.

The form defines the festival in general as: "a cultural ritual whereby the Qiang people seek to protect nature and humans' living environment, as well as promote social and family harmony."[245] This ritual has social as well as religious purposes according to the form: "the Qiang New Year festival is both a rite and a celebration that combines collective rituals."[246] Furthermore, since "The vast majority of the Qiang identify themselves with the solemn celebration of the New Year Festival,"[247] the festival constitutes an aspect of identity for Qiang

[238] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[239] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[240] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 5.
[241] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.
[242] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 7.
[243] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.
[244] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.
[245] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 1.
[246] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 2.
[247] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.

people. By stating that "The Qiang New Year Festival is a compendium of [Qiang] folk traditional culture,"[248] the form argues that, as a reflection of Qiang identity, social milieu and traditional rituals, the festival also represents the essence of Qiang culture. At the same time, it says that "the traditional folk belief is the core of Qiang New Year Festival activities."[249] This expression constitutes "folk belief" in the sense of its subcategory in China's national inventory of intangible heritage. Following the reasoning of the Qiang New Year festival as an essential practice of Qiang identity, social milieu and rituals and as folk belief in general, the festival can qualify as intangible cultural heritage and is rendered a cultural practice. The form thus speaks for the festival as a cultural as well as intangible heritage practice.

Conversely, the nomination's description of the festival has religious connotations. The form states that the Qiang New Year festival consists of "three parts: the sacrifice to the mountain, the community rejoicing and the sacrifices held in the families."[250] After the explanation of the mountain sacrifice, the second part is described as: "a moment of communal rejoicing and conviviality in thanksgiving to Heaven for his blessing and in prayer for his protection. This is the ceremony worshipping the highest among the gods of the Qiang pantheon."[251] This communal activity seemingly denotes a religious ceremony after all. For the third part, the form explains that families engage in "worship of the ancestors, the god of fire and the god of the family."[252] Consequently, the festival's three parts of communal sacrifice, communal ceremony, and familial sacrifice and worship are religious in nature. Nevertheless, the form's narrative does not recognize the Qiang festival or traditions as a religion.

The form ambiguously describes the domestic location that the Qiang New Year festival is attributed. According to the form, "the Qiang are mainly distributed in the upper Minjiang River in Northwestern China."[253] In practice, if one envisions the map of China, Sichuan province's Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, where the majority of Qiang people live, is more akin to a position in central or southwestern China than northwestern China.[254] Although the prefecture is located in the north of Sichuan province, describing this as northwestern China seems to stem from a skewed perspective of China's map. Northwestern China is more commonly related to the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. At the same time, the "Tibetan" in the prefecture's name could imply a more southwestern position in China.

[248] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[249] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[250] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[251] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[252] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[253] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 2.
[254] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 28, 40.

Either way, projecting the Qiang to live in the western part of China, be it northern or southern, and further away from urban centers, plays into interpreters' associations of indigenous people as living in more rural areas. This might connotate the exoticization of the Qiang ethnicity and traditions.

The Qiang, alongside all other ethnicities of China, were deterred from their cultural activities during the Cultural Revolution.[255] Regarding the continuity of the festival, the form acknowledges that there was an intermission in the twentieth century during which the festival was not celebrated, when it states that "From the middle of 1960s to the end of the 1970s, cultural activities across China were devastated to different extent due to historical matters; therefore the collective rituals of Qiang New Year were suspended."[256] These historical circumstances certainly refer to the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, the nomination is quick to dismiss this sidenote, focusing on the revival of the festival from the 1980s instead.

The nomination incorporates nationalist discourse through mentioning the "motherland." When the form argues that "In the course of the New Year Festival … the [Qiang] people express respect and worship towards all creatures, the motherland and the ancestors,"[257] the use of the motherland has an underlying meaning. The motherland in this case likely refers to the area the Qiang live, but more importantly also to the Chinese state. According to Wang and Chen, the "motherland" can refer to China maternally as being deprived of agency, humiliated and requiring protection. Simultaneously, a paternal projection of China as the "motherland" is also commonly envisioned as having authority, economic power and military power. Both these discourses can evoke nationalist affect.[258] The Chinese patriotic song "Ode to the Motherland" is an example hereof.[259] Consequently, the phrasing of the Qiang's interaction with the motherland maternally invokes dismal prospects for the continuation of the Qiang's way of life. Furthermore, paternally, the phrasing invokes the Chinese state as a powerful figure who can step up to save the Qiang. Therefore, nationalist expressions augment the threat the "helpless" Qiang face and portrays the Chinese government as the only actor capable of and qualified to save them.

This conception is also demonstrated in the form's emphasis on the Chinese government's contribution to protective measures. The central government returns as the financial benefactor in four out of six proposed measures to support the Qiang and their

[255] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 32.
[256] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[257] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 3.
[258] Wang and Chen, ""From 'Motherland.'"
[259] Hung, "The Politics," 364-365.

traditions. For example, "[the] Sichuan Music and Dance Institute take charge of the establishment of a database … financed by national financial budget with 400,000 RMB yuan, thus to facilitate the management and safeguarding of Qiang New Year at different levels."[260] As in this example, the inclusion of the central government's budgetary allocation is close in proximity to the intended effect for all of these four measures. Thus, the Chinese government is portrayed as primary contributor to the survival of and savior of Qiang traditions through their protective measures for the Qiang New Year festival.

Furthermore, one of the six proposed protective measures introduces central and local financial departments as the investors of (new) museums. The form devotes a paragraph to the justification of museums as valuable repositories of Qiang culture, but it seems that these museums function as more than that when it states "…and the public education to guide people's recognition on Qiang New Year and its meaning correctly…"[261] Similar to the rigid emphasis on procedures regarding Mazu belief and customs, the government here implies that there is a "correct recognition" of the festival. The underlying claim that there is only one, right way to understand it is unrealistic. Besides the cultural role of museums, the nomination attributes the museum the role of an institution to "guide," and effectively control, the narrative of Qiang traditions.

The form further acknowledges the effects heritagization can have in that it argues that touristic influence engenders loss of "correct" meaning and function of the Qiang New Year festival. The villages that do not organically celebrate the festival face a "stark difference in the cultural meanings transmitted, in the social function and in the presentation of the cultural contents."[262] According to the form, these effects can occur not only in response to the creation of museums devoted to Qiang traditions, but also due to the festival "following the development of [the] tourism industry [in] some villages of Wenchuan, Li and Mao and Wenchuan County."[263] The continuity in meaning and function of the Qiang New Year festival is more important than that of the Dragon Boat festival and Mazu belief and customs in the sense that the practice faces extinction as opposed to decline. While such continuation may be important for other intangible heritage practices, their continued existence is not at stake. In this light, explicitly addressing concerns about the effects commodification can have makes sense in this nomination for the Urgent Safeguarding List. Besides, this awareness on behalf of the state

[260] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.
[261] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 7.
[262] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 5.
[263] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 4.

party indicates the government's protective measures will avoid such decline for the practice. The Chinese government hereby demonstrates its ability to meet UNESCO criteria while aiding its own aims.

6.2 Video

While the content of the nomination video is similar to that of the nomination form, there are nuances in focus. It speaks more about the Qiang people themselves, as an "ancient ethnic group"[264] that appear to have a unique history of over two millennia. As the video emphasizes the festival's importance for the identity and continuity of Qiang culture and knowledge, the festival evidently plays a special role in the endurance of Qiang traditions. The video's statements that "only through the special carrier that is the New Year festival can Qiang civilization find the most inclusive and comprehensive manner to develop and be transmitted,"[265] and that "New Year festival ceremonies' chanting contains the essence of Qiang people's history and civilization,"[266] describe a large responsibility for the festival. Perhaps this is also why the video attributes great authority to the festival by arguing that "the Qiang New Year festival can be considered the most inclusive and complete living source of information among the Qiang intangible cultural legacies."[267] The video hereby again presents the Qiang New Year festival as the culmination of Qiang traditions and history in emphasizing the lived heritage aspect of the festival.

The constructive role of the festival is contrasted with the current jeopardy it faces. In displaying footage of the destruction the earthquake caused, the tone of the video is more somber than the nomination form and previous nomination files. This melancholy can be seen in the video's statement that "As a consequence of the earthquake, the social space, the cultural facilities, the objects and a series of information archives upon which the activities of the Qiang New Year festival relies have met an unparalleled destruction."[268] The video strengthens this narrative by only using Qiang ritual and ceremonial music, such as drumming and chanting, as background sounds. The video also explains that "behind these tumbling buildings [Qiang watchtowers], modern culture and culture of other ethnic groups are also silently infiltrating," which is probably a result of the identified risk of "the impact of changing times."[269] The Qiang

[264] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[265] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[266] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[267] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[268] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[269] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 4.

New Year festival's importance is thus impaired both by modern developments and natural disasters.

There are several religious connotations evident in the video. Regarding the activities of the festival, the video states that "behind the rites of the New Year festival there is the need to express gratitude to and recompense the gods."[270] This implies that worship of the Qiang pantheon is the main function and goal of the festival. Customs that were not mentioned in the form also contribute to this objective. For example, white stones have an important meaning, as the video explains that "white stones are symbols of the gods"[271] and that "each stone is possessed by god and contains enormous power."[272] These stones are placed on watchtowers and houses as a means of veneration.[273] Significantly, the video refers to "the naturalistic religion of the Qiang"[274] in the context of this custom. It is odd that the nomination hereby explicitly presents worship of the Qiang pantheon as religious, and even a religion. Nevertheless, since the nomination only encompasses the festival, and these customs are not related to the festival but rather to the Qiang's worship traditions, the religious intents of the Qiang New Year festival are not necessarily implicated in this statement.

The video puts comparatively more emphasis on the harmony of people with nature than between people. It even explains that "the Qiang New Year festival has deep significance at a time when our civilization began to question human['s] unlimited exploitation of nature."[275] This attitude towards nature makes sense in light of the Qiang's veneration of nature-related deities, but the relation to contemporaneous environmental problems seems forced considering the reclusive and alternative way of life the Qiang people that choose to remain in their native habitat lead. The customs of placing red ribbons around trees to stop lumberers from cutting down trees for example is attributed to the harmonious co-existence between Qiang people and nature. The nomination form did not include this custom. Besides the harmony between people and nature, the nomination also extends this harmony to all life forms. Harmonious co-existence goes beyond nature when the video states that "The Qiang people continued to maintain their unaltered attitude of worship and reference toward all creation."[276] The video further claims that "[the Qiang] perfectly embody the traditional Chinese ideal of unity between humanity and

[270] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[271] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[272] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[273] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New,"; Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 38.
[274] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[275] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[276] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."

heaven."[277] Through the Qiang's dedication to and awareness of what respectful co-existence constitutes, the Qiang ethnicity, and festival in particular, are presented as an ideal yet unidirectional way of living with nature that cannot be reached by outsiders. The video thus appears to idealize the contributions of the Qiang to environmental goals.

The video ends optimistically by highlighting the role of Qiang communities themselves. With ceremonial Qiang chanting in the background, the video states that "we strongly believe that through the common efforts, this ancient people … will be able to perform another miracle."[278] This strongly implies that the reinvigoration of the Qiang New Year festival and Qiang traditions will arise out of collaborated efforts. Here, it remains to the interpreter to complement that the Qiang would not be able to succeed in surviving if it were not for the Chinese state's contributions.

6.3 Consent of Communities

Twenty-three letters demonstrate Qiang communities' approval of the nomination. According to Zhang, local governments were the main controllers of the application and community's consent, while the Qiang people themselves were excluded.[279] Eighteen towns and villages provided letters, which encompass all townships listed as concerned groups in the nomination form. These all use the same message, which is the following: "We know and support Sichuan Provincial Culture Department's decision to list the "Qiang New Year Festival" as an intangible cultural heritage under urgent state protection."[280] However, this statement legitimizes "state protection," and in turn also legitimizes potential interference in heritage management by the central government.

Furthermore, the quotation marks around the practice's name were not included for the Dragon Boat festival and Mazu belief and customs nomination's consent of communities. The punctuation gives the impression that Qiang communities did not know what they were signing for. This perspective could mean that people do not refer to this practice as the "(Qiang) New Year festival" amongst themselves. Perhaps the Qiang's involvement in the application was indeed overshadowed by the local government's initiative.

[277] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[278] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."
[279] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 104.
[280] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Consent of Communities."

6.4 Committee Decision

In the explanation for their decision regarding the inscription of the Qiang New Year festival at the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for The Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Committee is more opinionated than for practices nominated for the regular representative list. For the Urgent Safeguarding List, the Committee's tone is more steadfast. For example, the committee first acknowledges that "National and provincial authorities … have gained the enthusiastic support of Qiang communities,"[281] then "[the Committee] reminds [the state party] of the continuing need to ensure the fullest possible participation of Qiang communities at all levels of implementing this safeguarding plan."[282] The need for involvement of Qiang communities is pronounced more so than it was for Mazu believers and followers or Dragon Boat festival celebrators. This strictness could be a result of the Committee's perception that the Qiang communities' involvement was lacking, but could also be due to their participation being more important since the practice's continuation is at risk. At the same time the Committee expresses sympathy with the community for its losses as a result of the earthquake. Furthermore, the Committee strongly urges China to not commodify the Qiang New Year festival: "[The Committee] Takes further note of the State Party's intention to revitalize the festival by promoting tourism, including the construction of museums …, but cautions that such initiatives risk diminishing the meaning and importance of the festival to local Qiang, and encourages it to … serve primarily the needs of Qiang people."[283] Nevertheless, despite the Committee's seeming awareness of inconsistencies in the community participation as well as in the protective measures of the nomination, it approved the festival for inscription.

6.5 Developments after Inscription

One of the nomination's protective measures that is intended as educative and contributive to Qiang practices' transmission proposes that "living shows will be presented at museums"[284] by Qiang people. However, such performative shows can be problematic because they risk the exoticization and commodification of practices. Wang and Prott also recognize this risk when they state that "the government programmes generally lack the authenticity of those made by the ethnic groups themselves and rather are performances for tourists"[285] about Qiang celebrations, and that this is particularly problematic because they are short of "the religious

[281] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Decision: 4.COM 14.02*.
[282] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Decision: 4.COM 14.02*.
[283] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Decision: 4.COM 14.02*.
[284] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.
[285] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 32.

dimension and cultural depth of those created by the group itself."[286] Zhang too identifies issues with the Chinese government's framing of the Qiang New Year festival when they state that "the [Qiang] New Year [festival] is losing its significance and value in the local community as it is wrongly celebrated."[287] According to Zhang, the "Qiang New Year festival" was not originally a festival. The Chinese government created this myth to manage cultural practices of minorities through rendering "primitive" ethnicities into having "positive energy"[288] and positive prospects. This myth is pervasive to such an extent that Qiang people themselves now too have altered their interpretation and execution of the "festival."[289] Since this protective measure in essence connotes the commodification and exoticization of Qiang practices, the Chinese government may have detrimentally adapted the heritage of the Qiang ethnicity to their own advantages.

6.6 Findings

The Qiang New Year festival has religious components but is not considered a religious festival in the nomination file. Even though the nomination video acknowledges Qiang traditions include religious beliefs, the fact that the festival is branded as a cultural festival, and not directly a religious one, signifies that the nomination does not recognize the existence of a Qiang religion. The state's involvement in the nomination precludes such a conception. Overall, in its display of setting the right example of the Qiang practice as a cultural festival, an intangible heritage practice, the nomination demonstrates the Chinese authorities' ability to set and control the one standard conception of the Qiang New Year festival.

[286] Wang and Prott, "Cultural revitalisation," 32.
[287] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 105-106.
[288] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 102.
[289] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 101-103, 107.

7. Analysis

The three nominations discussed above each conform to and satisfy UNESCO criteria for intangible heritage, but also show signs of underlying objectives in the nomination files. What are the purposes of these nominations for the Chinese state? The discourse used in the nomination files reveals why these practices are politically, societally, culturally and occasionally economically beneficial for and beneficially used by the Chinese government.

7.1 Legitimizing Strategic State Involvement

The Chinese government is able to control the image and representation of Qiang traditions because the struggle for continuity the Qiang New Year festival faces endorses relatively rigid transmission of traditions. The fact the Qiang New Year festival, unlike the two regular representative heritage practices of the Dragon Boat festival and Mazu belief and customs, is going extinct means that the manner and urgency of transmission are different. Even though governmental advocacy for relatively fixed transmission might be reasonable for the endangered Qiang New Year festival, the initiatives described in the form that aim to preserve the practice have contradictory consequences. Tourism, commodification and heritagization lurking behind governmental initiatives contribute to the practice's infringement. Moreover, the effects of tourism, commodification and heritagization are paradoxically legitimized, for example in ascribing museums both a cultural and controlling role in the presentation of Qiang traditions. As such, the Chinese government uses the threatened position of the Qiang New Year festival as an opportunity to create a single correct conception of Qiang traditions.

The nomination file demonstrates another aspect of this conception in that the description of the festival contributes to the exoticization and othering of Qiang people. First, presenting the area where Qiang live as rural, and perhaps even as "exotic" as Tibet and Xinjiang, furthers the romanticization of the Qiang ethnicity. Second, the idealization of Qiang living in harmony with nature and creation in general is depicted as impossible to reach for non-Qiang people. In combination with the knowledge that this way of life is going extinct, Qiang traditions are hereby also exoticized. Third, the adaptation of Qiang practices into a festival is to the advantage of the Chinese state's control over minorities, for instance by exoticizing "primitive" ethnicities while furthering their potential to be "modernized" by the Han majority. Lastly, speaking of "the naturalistic religion of the Qiang"[290] similarly indicates an othering

[290] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, "Qiang New."

narrative. The distinction that the nomination hereby creates between the Qiang and Han majority can solidify the Han majority and Chinese nation as per Gladney's argument.

Furthermore, the protective measures to alleviate the practice's threatened position affect the contemporary viability of the festival. In seeing the festival as the culmination of Qiang culture, it corresponds that Shibi are considered unmissable in the festival. Even for the Qiang people in general, Shibi are important. Yet, they are seen separately from inheritors. The continuity of the festival would benefit from allowing for an overlap in Shibi and inheritor categories in its protection. There is thus a contradiction in the nomination between the significance of Shibi for the continuity of the festival and the exclusion of Shibi. Furthermore, the proposal of holding "living shows"[291] displaying Qiang traditions risks misrepresenting them. In addition, focusing on the contemporary revival of the festival and how the meanings behind it continue to flourish obscures the historical negative impact of Chinese government on the Qiang New Year festival during the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese state's protective measures hence result in a management of the representation and continuity of Qiang traditions that is deficient in "traditional" meaning and function appertaining to the Qiang New Year festival.

Another manifestation of excessive state involvement is that the contributions of the Chinese state are presented as so integral that without them the festival would not be able to live on. In the nomination file, the Qiang and the transmission of their traditions appear to be impaired by modern developments and natural disasters. In consequence, the Qiang need help to preserve their way of life. The use of the "motherland" in the nomination form reveals nationalist discourse that also magnifies the important role of the Chinese government in saving the Qiang. Moreover, the emphasis on the central government as financial contributor to measures contributing to the continuity of the festival depicts the government as savior of Qiang traditions. Overall, the state's engagement is seemingly unmissable for the survival of the Qiang New Year festival.

Beyond these aspects of the nomination that may make the government seem to be assisting the Qiang is the more overt indication that the government negatively contributes to the preservation of the Qiang New Year festival. The required evidence for the participation of represented communities demonstrates an explicit prerogative for state involvement or even interference. The evidence for community participation is also arguably lacking in actual involvement of Qiang people in the nomination. Furthermore, while the nomination seems to

[291] Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 6.

have been prepared by the local government, this may cloak its commission from the central government. Indeed, Zhang explains the initiative came from the central Chinese government that consequentially appointed specialists to research Qiang traditions and their viability. In tracing the reconstruction and nomination process after the Sichuan earthquake, he finds that Chinese officials assigned the Qiang's case to the State Ethnic Affairs Commission that oversaw the nomination.[292] This indicates that the Chinese government is able to alter Qiang traditions for its own benefit.

The Committee recognizes potential shortcomings of the Qiang New Year festival's nomination when it describes its foundation for approving enlistment, but this critical attitude may not be unique to the festival. Other than the Committee's positive appraisal of the Dragon Boat festival and Mazu belief and customs nomination files, the Committee took a more critical stance towards the Qiang New Year festival nomination. However, since these practices were nominated for a different list, it is worthwhile to consider whether this attitude is present for other Chinese Urgent Safeguarding List inscriptions in 2009. There were two, namely techniques for building Chinese wooden arch bridges and traditional Li textile. The Committee's approval of these two practices connotes it seeks to improve Chinese government-led transmission and gives suggestions therefor. It encourages the Chinese state to allocate more central budgetary contributions and pay attention to sustainability of material used for wooden arch bridges, to expand subsidies for practitioners for traditional Li textile techniques and recommends the state party to follow the custom of burying Li production tools and textiles with deceased community members.[293] By stating that "[the Committee] emphasiz[es] the importance of duly respecting Li customary practices that call for such artefacts to be buried along with their makers,"[294] this last recommendation also has a relatively opinionated tone. Yet, when the Committee urged the Chinese state to ensure participation of represented communities and ward off measures that will contribute to the heritagization of the Qiang New Year festival, it was more reproachful. Thus, since a critical attitude of the Committee is not necessarily always present in other cases of Urgent Safeguarding List nominations, the Committee decision is also indicative of an imperfection in the Chinese state's nomination of the practice.

[292] Zhang, "Intangible Cultural," 97-99.
[293] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 14.03*; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 14.04*.
[294] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, *Decision: 4.COM 14.04*.

Evidently, the Chinese government instrumentally applies the nomination of the Qiang New Year festival in order to control the image of the Qiang in several ways. The content of the nomination exoticizes the Qiang and their way of life, presents Chinese governmental contributions as unmissable and legitimizes state involvement in heritage preservation. Furthermore, through labeling the Qiang New Year festival as a cultural ritual or celebration, the official mainstream interpretation of the festival downplays popular religious components and connotations or even fails to recognize them entirely. Instead, a heritage perspective and perception of the festival becomes prevalent on an international stage. This characterization of the Qiang New Year festival is at least partly possible because the Chinese authorities impeded involvement of the Qiang in the nomination process, and this was also evident in the Committee's decision. The nomination file thus exposes efforts by the Chinese state that constitute the adaptation of Qiang traditions and signal a strategy to build a Chinese nation through coalescing the Han majority.

7.2 Altering Mazu Worship

Nominating Mazu worship as belief and customs holds the advantage for the Chinese government that it creates an international statement that Mazu worship is a culture, and not a religion. This broad nomination is unlike the Qiang New Year festival for which only one festival and not Qiang traditions or belief in the Qiang pantheon were nominated. Since the strong language used in the nomination form of Mazu belief and customs implies the Chinese state believes this is the only right interpretation of the practice, it is interesting to consider why the Chinese state chose not a festival or ceremony, but the belief in its entirety for a UNESCO nomination. The image of Mazu worship as heritage was bolstered and enabled especially because it was inscribed. A broader nomination accordingly holds both domestic and international benefits. Domestically, this supports "Mazu belief," whilst its presentation as "Mazu culture" precludes a contradiction with the legally ambiguous position of popular religious beliefs in China. Internationally, the nomination painted a positive image of China as looking after popular religious beliefs and China in general as a creative, diverse and tolerant nation. The nomination of Mazu belief and culture thus saw the Chinese government expropriating the cultural practice and framing it in a non-threatening way.

Nevertheless, the conception of Mazu belief and customs is actually in contradiction to its equivalent on China's national inventory. One of the criteria for practices to be eligible for UNESCO intangible heritage status is that the practice must be enlisted on a national list of

intangible heritage.[295] While, as the form states, Mazu worship was included in the first group of nationally recognized intangible heritage, this was under the designation of "Goddess Mazu Ceremonies."[296] For the national inventory, this practice constitutes a yearly ceremony to worship Mazu on her birthday that is one of "the three ceremonies of China."[297] Furthermore, unlike the explanation of Mazu belief and customs in the UNESCO nomination file, the description for Goddess Mazu Ceremonies does not explicitly state that Mazu is still worshipped in a contemporary setting. It focuses on the historical origin, imperial prominence and international dissemination instead. Despite these differences, the national entry refers to the fact that "Mazu Worshipping was inscribed in the UNESCO list."[298] Moreover, UNESCO's Mazu belief and customs page constitutes an associated article of Goddess Mazu Ceremonies. The Chinese government thus incongruently considered Goddess Mazu Ceremonies as the national heritage foundation for the international nomination of Mazu belief and customs.

Mazu belief and customs is in fact the only practice of the three under present consideration that stands out in comparison to the practices on China's national inventory. The national inventory's equivalent of the Dragon Boat festival encompasses the same practices as those that were outlined in its UNESCO nomination file.[299] The Qiang New Year festival was in the second group to be recognized as national-level heritage.[300] Besides this festival, different Qiang celebrations and other minority customs are enlisted as national Chinese intangible heritage. In fact, the majority of the elements on the national inventory is related to different ethnicities, such as clothes, celebrations and traditions of the Han ethnicity but mostly other Chinese ethnicities. Thus, the extension of a single yearly ceremony to an entire belief system made in the UNESCO nomination constitutes a significant alteration, one that is not made for the Dragon Boat festival or Qiang New Year festival.

The decision to extend the practice creates a rupture between the national and international conceptions of Mazu worship and puts the nomination of the collective Mazu worship in a new light. Domestically, worship of Mazu in general is presented as ordinary whereas yearly ceremonies in honor of her birthday are elevated above this belief. Internationally, these ceremonies are only components of Mazu worship as a larger whole. As a result, it seems that China acknowledges this folk belief for the international community as

[295] UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Basic Texts," 31.
[296] Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "First Batch."
[297] Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "Goddess Mazu Ceremonies."
[298] Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "Goddess Mazu Ceremonies."
[299] Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "First Batch."
[300] Chinese Cultural Studies Center, "Second Batch."

intangible heritage. Nevertheless, for China's own population, the popular religious belief is not acknowledged as intangible heritage. There is thus a double motive for the Chinese state's nomination to UNESCO: not only does China present itself as diverse and tolerant, it also characterizes itself as connected with Chinese groups living abroad. This cohesive vision includes mainland Chinese, Taiwanese Chinese and overseas Chinese under the umbrella of a harmonious Chinese nation.

The nomination to UNESCO itself indeed claims that Mazu worship stimulates harmony, which promotes governmental objectives of social cohesion, stability and Hu Jintao's "harmonious society" and "harmonious world." Similarly, pilgrimage activities are multifunctionally utilized to foster a connection between Chinese people, cross-strait stability, cross-strait relations, social cohesion and perhaps ultimately a Chinese nation in their description in the nomination file. The Chinese government also incorporates a territorial claim of Taiwan through entangling the island in the nomination. Furthermore, by presenting the practice as one that both historically and contemporaneously transcends borders and holds worldwide authority, the nomination stimulates China's soft power. Besides the descriptions that portrayed the Chinese government as savior of the benevolent Mazu belief and customs, the exhaustive protective measures contain possibly detrimental ones, such as measures that (inadvertently) contribute to heritagization. The effectuation of a discursive hierarchy of temples through continually emphasizing Meizhou island's temple as "the First Mazu Temple" is another more restrictive ascription to Mazu belief and customs. The discourse in the nomination thus included objectives of reinforcing the conception of the Chinese nation-state as well as restricting Mazu worship.

Another indication of the nomination's contribution to restricting Mazu followers is that UNESCO's Committee may have been overly positive regarding the participation of communities in the nomination. The nomination form stated the governmental nomination received support from followers only after the application was set in motion and the consent letters conveyed officials' consent rather than individuals' involvement. However, as shown above, evidence was found for the followers' initiative to nominate Mazu belief and customs. Most significantly, the nomination file's use of "Non-Material Cultural Heritage" instead of intangible cultural heritage is uncommon and represents a divergence in heritage terms used in mainland China and Taiwan. Hence, the nomination to UNESCO might stem from Taiwanese Mazu followers and believers. The explanation for the Committee's decision also attests to the fact that the nomination process was not initiated by the Chinese government, as it acknowledges that the nomination arose out of a Mazu followers-led initiative. Mazu followers

and believers were thus involved in the nomination process of Mazu belief and customs, but not necessarily in the letters demonstrating the consent of communities.

The Chinese state evidently took UNESCO's list as an opportunity to present and brand Mazu worship as a culture over religion. With this argumentation, the government can also challenge the conception that folk belief holds an ambiguous position in China. As a result, the Chinese government furthers the objective of appearing to have freedom of religious belief, in turn potentially contributing to the international image of China as a democracy. By taking control of the category under which Mazu worship falls, and advocating for respectful treatment of this intangible heritage, the government elevates practice's status from an unlawful belief to an internationally recognized practice. That the conception of Mazu belief and customs as intangible heritage is the only interpretation as accepted by the Chinese government demonstrates its inflexible attitude towards a different interpretation of Mazu worship, such as Mazu (folk) religion. International viewpoints are thus an aim in framing Mazu worship as Mazu belief and customs for the Chinese regime.

7.3 Ambiguities to Construct a Chinese Nation

In accordance with the findings of scholars regarding the practice, the nomination file of the Dragon Boat festival indicates the Chinese government reworked the festival from a popular religious folk tradition to a cultural heritage icon. As early as in the nineteenth century, de Groot identifies that the origins of the festival are hard to ascertain. This does not only go for outsiders, but also for Chinese people themselves.[301] De Groot concludes that approaching the festival as a folk festival and not a religious festival is most likely factual, although the festival's customs have popular religious or exorcist origins. The celebration aims at warding off bodily sickness and evil residing in houses, while the invocation of a dragon and the dragon boat races are grounded in a wish for rain. De Groot also explains that the consumption of glutinous rice dumplings is not in response to any historical figure throwing themselves into a river. Instead, it appears that these rice snacks were an adaptation of the grain packages that were eaten in the north. Since in southern China, rice was more readily available than grains, the festival's food depended on the region.[302] When these rice snacks became more prominent nationally, the connection to grain cultivation was lost. Indeed, the role of victuals in the festival according to the nomination file takes on a different meaning as a component of a celebratory feast. The

[301] Groot, "Yearly celebrations," 250-251.
[302] Groot, "Yearly celebrations," 253-255, 265, 287, 295-298.

nomination of the Dragon Boat festival presents the victuals that originated as an exorcist tradition out of popular religious beliefs as cultural heritage and a national means of celebrating.

It is not only the meaning of victuals that shifts from a popular religious belief to a constructive cultural practice in the nomination file. De Groot demonstrates that the origin of the Dragon Boat festival itself in all likelihood lies in an appeasement to the dragon as god of water and rain to dispel drought and thereby ensure successful harvest.[303] That this is the more historically accurate interpretation of the conception of the Dragon Boat festival can also be seen in that the explanation of the festival's activities in the nomination file (implicitly) foregrounds the festival's popular religious elements. For example, the nomination video addresses folk customs as the source of the festival. While the file does recognize a variety of ways to celebrate the festival, these are not equally nor completely addressed and challenge the multiplex origins of dragon boat races. The nomination presents these races as sports competitions. However, the folk origins of the festival suggest that dragon boat races are the combined result of naval and popular religious traditions. Thus, considering its different origin stories, the Chinese government shrouds the popular religious origins of the dragon boat races by regarding them as a sport in the Dragon Boat festival's nomination file.

Besides this misrepresentation, there were other inexactitudes in the nomination's depiction of the Dragon Boat festival. The local Chinese government is responsible for the commodification of the festival in one of the cities representative for its Dragon Boat festival traditions, namely Miluo city. The prioritization of economic development and tourism tarnishes the continuity of the festival's tradition. Furthermore, the number of letters for the consent of represented communities is scant. The Mazu belief and customs nomination file has almost sixty letters for more than 200 reported million Mazu followers, and for over 300,000 Qiang people, there are twenty-three letters, some with multiple signatories.[304] Yet, for the Dragon Boat festival with purportedly more than one billion celebrators, only seven letters with one signatory each were submitted. The Committee does not mention the amount of represented communities that consent. In comparison to its response to the Qiang New Year festival and Mazu belief and customs nominations, it is odd that the Committee does not question the lack of community involvement. At the same time, providing approval on behalf of one billion people is even more challenging than doing so for heritage nominations in general. Regardless, seven letters should be insufficient to represent the at least one billion people that celebrate the

[303] Groot, "Yearly celebrations," 253, 291, 295-298.
[304] China National Academy of Arts, *The Mazu*, 1; Culture Department of Sichuan Province, *Qiang New*, 7.

festival. By ignoring these actualities in the description of the festival, the Chinese government is able to standardize the conception of the Dragon Boat festival.

The Chinese government in turn utilizes the harmonization of the festival to construct a Chinese nation. Because the nomination emphasizes the celebrations in mainland China in general and certain minorities' specifically, the Han majority and overseas Chinese are excluded from the official international narrative of this national festival and public holiday. Considering the fact that Taiwan is mentioned in the Mazu belief and customs nomination file, its absence in the Dragon Boat festival nomination is likely unrelated to sovereignty disputes. Nevertheless, as Gladney argues about the representation of minorities, it is exactly this absence of the Han majority that contributes to the construction of a Chinese community. In consequence, the emphasis on mainland Chinese activities related to the Dragon Boat festival in the nomination could have been given precedence over activities in Hong Kong or Taiwan for an identical ambition. Perhaps the form also invokes that the majority of the population and ethnic groups in China celebrate the festival to attest to the government's positive attitude towards cultural pluralism. The Chinese states hence makes the festival's nomination propagate a diverse but unified Chinese nation-state, that through the nonappearance of Taiwan and Hong Kong does not necessarily include these regions as parts of Greater China.

Another aspect promoting Chinese nation-building in the Dragon Boat festival nomination file is the Chinese government's envisionment of the ideal configuration of the Chinese population. In claiming that the Dragon Boat festival enhances national solidarity, the festival allegedly promotes Chinese (cultural) identity and Hu Jintao's policy aiming towards a "harmonious society" and "harmonious world." Furthermore, the explicit expression of a Chinese festival spreading to other Asian countries gives China a claim as the real, original owner of the festival. This view can contribute to imbuing a sense of pride for Chinese people. Lastly, the Chinese governmental discourse's prominence of Qu Yuan's tale in the festival alludes to the covert instillment of loyal and patriotic sentiment in its population. The Chinese state thus seeks to promote soft power internationally and political legitimacy domestically through conceptualizing a loyal, patriotic Chinese population in the Dragon Boat festival nomination file.

It appears that the Chinese government centralizes control over the narrative of the Dragon Boat festival in its nomination file. Despite the identified ambiguities in the festival's community involvement, presentation of customs and its origins, the nomination romanticizes endeavors of the Chinese state to safeguard the festival, emphasizing on an international stage the benevolence of the Chinese government. The nomination file thus reveals multiple

objectives behind the international promotion of the Dragon Boat festival that orchestrate the festival's origins, geographic range, viability in terms of heritagization and nationalistic connotations to altogether positively impact the Chinese Communist Party's regime.

8. Conclusion

The Chinese state nominated the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and Qiang New Year festival to UNESCO to contrive popular religious beliefs as intangible cultural heritage practices. The practices' official status as national and international heritage validates state-led protection. The government hereby secured legitimate control over these UNESCO-recognized practices. In the process, it acquired the prerogative to adapt cultural practices in the course of safeguarding them. As a result, it became possible for the Chinese state's designated transformation of cultural practices into heritage to be accompanied by the alteration of practices. This further allowed the government to expropriate popular religious beliefs. Thus, the nomination of the three practices constitutes a strategic Chinese governmental move towards capturing and expropriating popular religious beliefs as static, invariable heritage practices.

That the Chinese state instrumentally utilizes these heritage practices is evident in the nominations in that they all contribute to political, societal, cultural and economic Chinese governmental objectives. The nomination files promote political legitimacy, the population's loyalty, social cohesion by furthering the idea of a community, cross-strait stability and relations, patriotism, the country's soft power, Hu Jintao's policies of a "harmonious society" and "harmonious world" in the shape of a unified Chinese nation-state, nation-building and the idea of a united China and a Chinese nation using inclusive, unifying and cultural pluralist language. In the case of Mazu belief and customs, this vision of a Chinese nation is extended beyond the Chinese state, to the entire Chinese nation that includes overseas Chinese. This also constitutes a governmental territorial claim of Taiwan and competition with Taiwan over the most significant location and thereby ownership of Mazu worship. Conversely, in the context of the Dragon Boat festival, the nomination file ignores the One-China principle and disregards Taiwan, and also Hong Kong, from the Chinese nation that celebrates the festival. Furthermore, the nomination files express a desire of the Chinese government to control the expression of the festivals and worship through education in cultural institutions, such as schools, research centers and museums, in a correct or strict manner. The three nomination files thus cooperatively demonstrate a wide range of potential objectives the Chinese government may have had for their nomination as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. Principally, they legitimize state involvement in practices and successively allow the state to adapt practices to suit its own needs, most importantly to construct a Chinese nation.

Nevertheless, the nomination and inscription of the three practices engendered detrimental effects for the viability of the practices and in turn their heritage practitioners. First, underlying governmental economic and touristic aims result in commodification or heritagization of practices. Second, the government neglects the importance or position of folk religious elements in these traditions, thereby misrepresenting practices. Third, on the one hand, the participation of communities involved in the Dragon Boat festival and Qiang New Year festival were overly positively portrayed in the creation of their nomination files. On the other hand, in the case of Mazu belief and customs, believers' contributions were downplayed for the purpose of enhancing the role of the Chinese government in initiating the nomination. Fourth, romanticizing the role of the Chinese government in saving practices has the effect of cloaking its true intentions with the nomination of popular religious beliefs. For the Qiang New Year festival for example, the Chinese government takes on the role of a rescuer and protector of Qiang traditions in times when its survival is challenged. In the process, it exoticizes the Qiang. Nominating Mazu belief and customs even required the recasting of a nationally established ceremony for a goddess into an internationally recognized goddess worship. This alteration and contradiction were not applicable to or beneficial for the Dragon Boat festival and Qiang New Year festival. The genuineness of these three nomination files can thus be contested. The evidently unrepresentatively positive light in which the three practices are painted thus holds commonalities as well as variations.

What the three nominations have in common above all is that they present and emphasize folk religious elements like cultural heritage elements as the only accepted and right interpretation of these elements on an international stage. They also positively contribute to a worldwide paragon, as each of the three nominations argues that the practice encourages a "harmonious society" and "harmonious world." At the same time, Zhu argues that harmony is a necessary benchmark for a religion's entitlement to occur in China. There is thus at least one requirement that the three practices fit with regards to meeting the criteria of being recognized as a religion in China. Nevertheless, their popular religious components and origins are not recognized but shrouded. The demarcations between intangible heritage, folk belief and religion have thus become even more blurred. Being officially protected or included by Chinese law is an unattainable result at present. Therefore, it appears that China in reality does not have freedom of religious belief.

While this thesis demonstrated that the Chinese state multipurposely nominated three popular religious practices as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, further research into this topic can determine the practical impact of the identified objectives. Antecedently, there is still

a need to examine the content of Mazu belief and customs' Chinese letters submitted for the consent of represented communities. Furthermore, interviews with represented communities can assist in ascertaining the degree to which they were involved in the nomination processes of the Dragon Boat festival, Mazu belief and customs and the Qiang New Year festival. Since this thesis considered popular religious practices' inscriptions by China in 2009 when nominating intangible heritage practices became conventional, identification and analysis of popular religious belief-related nominations post-2009 is pending. The comparison between national Chinese heritage practices and their UNESCO international heritage equivalents is also productive to detect whether any practices were extended, like Goddess Mazu Ceremonies was, or otherwise altered. Focalizing on China's domestic management of intangible heritage in terms of national and provincial heritage lists can disclose how practices are selected for nomination, which practices succeed in inscription and why some are not enlisted. Specifically, that the heritage practices on China's national inventory are largely divided by ethnicities is reminiscent of Gladney's argument that the characterization of minorities contributes to the construction of Chinese nation. Research on China's domestic intangible heritage can thus examine if the inscribed practices correspond with Gladney's theory and if this means that the instrumental use of heritage is now a widespread and common strategy in China. Taking these approaches towards heritage nominations into consideration is likely to expand the postulation presented in this thesis and reappraises understanding of whether Chinese people are truly free to have any religious beliefs.

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