






Liuzhi Suojia Ecomuseum at Guizhou: Theater of Interaction and Negotiating Ethnic Minority Identities in China

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ABSTRACT

This study employs qualitative research methods to examine the distinctive identity of the Miao people during the transformation of the Ecomuseum, with particular attention to how identity is represented within the Ecomuseum context and how it interacts with external audiences. The technical procedures adopted were bibliographic research and field research. The findings reveal that the everyday practices and rituals of the Longhorn Miao have become phenomena subject to observation, interpretation, and interaction by external visitors, shaping the maintenance and transmission of their unique identity. The Suojia Ecomuseum showcases the Suojia ethnic identity and serves as a performance space for self-presentation in interactions with outsiders. In this parallel context, cultural performance is no longer solely for the benefit of community life but are also designed to meet the expectations of outside observers. This parallel position creates a complex connection between Longhorn Miao, consumers, and other stakeholders, resulting in a continuous and dynamic process of negotiating the self-identities of the Miao people with outsiders. This research advances Ecomuseum studies by moving beyond heritage preservation narratives to emphasize the Ecomuseum as a contested arena of identity negotiation, cultural politics, and globalization.

Keywords: Suojia Ecomuseum, Ethnic Identity, Theater of Interaction, Identity Negotiation

INTRODUCTION

Eco-museum concept was first proposed by French museologists Georges Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine in 1970s. From its earliest theoretical formulations, the eco-museum was defined as a traditional museum model. By relying on centralized authority, the eco-museum was characterized by community participation, integration of both cultural and natural heritage and decentralizing curatorial roles among authorities (Davis, 2011; Corsane, 2006). Researchers describe this as a “museum without walls,” which is embedded in natural landscapes rather than a single institutional structure. The Eco-Museum concept gain rapid traction across Europe, particularly in Northern and Southern regions. In the Nordic countries (Sweden and Norway), with their effective democratic traditions and “folkhemmet” philosophy, leads to an emphasis of community-led decision-making and

shared stewardship. For instance, Sewdesh Eco-museums were integrated with local associations to increase cultural and tourism growth (Corsane et al., 2007). The Ecomuseum of Italy has a strong link with the philosophy of “slow living” and strategies for traditional regrowth, which effectively develop in rural mountainous and agricultural areas (Chen & Liu, 2023). Whereas the European approach showed the principles of the Ecomuseum: territoriality, the holistic conception of heritage, and community participation. Eco-museum concept was initiated by the Asian countries in Japan by incorporating it into the broader *tsukurimura* (“village-making”) movement aimed at reshaping and revitalising rural regions. The Japanese model was highly systematised, characterised by comprehensive planning, strong government support, and integration with tourism economies, with community participation structured within an organised framework (Ihara et al., 2018; Li et al., 2023)). As a result, a top-down institutional model has been used in China to introduce eco-museum. Whereas it was combined with both cultural preservation and government practices with some restricted reality (An, 2011; Shang, 2017). Whereas Eco museum’s theoretical foundations have found the concept of territory, community, and heritage. Further, their execution has exposed a fundamental contradiction: There is a disagreement between community development and the particularities of regional power dynamics, economic pressures, and cultural practices (Zheng et al., 2025). Research on Ecomuseums in China has primarily emphasized their role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and revitalising minority communities (Yang, 2025). Scholars have argued that such institutions play an important role in fostering community participation and sustaining minority traditions (Lu, 2024; Xiong, 2013). Following the establishment of the Suojia Ecomuseum, studies have explored the challenges posed by external cultural influences, tourism development, and labor migration for traditional society (Fang, 2010). Scholars have also proposed strengthening community capacity through training, education, and enhanced cultural awareness, as well as by building skills for heritage transmission, management, and entrepreneurship (Han & Jin, 2018; Karanikola & Panagiotopoulos, 2025). At the same time, while endangered cultural traditions require protection, tensions may emerge between the local community’s pressing needs for development and external perspectives prioritizing “authenticity” (Pan, 2006). Although these studies have made significant contributions, the complexity of ethnic identity negotiation and the politics of representation in the Suojia Ecomuseum context has not yet been sufficiently explored. This research addresses that gap by conceptualizing the Suojia Ecomuseum as an interactive theater of ethnic identity negotiation, thereby enriching the theoretical intersections of anthropology, heritage governance, and cultural politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is basic research utilizing qualitative methods. It aims to achieve four main objectives: 1) To study the sociocultural development of Miao, an ethnic group in the Suojia community, from the beginning till 2025. 2) To study the ‘Self-identity’ in the dimension of Ethnicity of Longhorn Miao in the Suojia community. 3) To study the process of coexistence of ‘Self-Identity of Longhorn Miao’ in the context of in-between ethnicity and as part of “Suojia Ecomuseum”. 4) To study ‘Suojia Ecomuseum’ in the dimension of the theater of Interaction and Negotiating Minority Identity. The selected research method enables an in-depth exploration of the sociocultural development, self-identity, coexistence, and interactive negotiation processes of the Longhorn Miao within the context of the Suojia Ecomuseum. The data collection for this study combined fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation conducted within the Suojia Ecomuseum and across twelve Longhorn Miao villages in its vicinity. Fieldwork focused on the Longhorn Miao community, including their daily practices, cultural performances, and interactions with visitors and museum staff. There are some physical interviews that are implicated with three groups of participants: community members, museum administrators, and external visitors, for various approaches on cultural portrayal and identity negotiation. To collect both ordinary and spectacular occasions in festival performances and traditional practices, there is an effective interaction between both staged and cultural protection. In addition to fieldwork, documentary analysis was conducted on relevant academic literature, museum archives, exhibition catalogues, government policy documents, and media reports concerning Ecomuseum development and the cultural heritage of the Longhorn Miao. To identify themes, narrative patterns, and representations, a systemic code has been explored with both local and institutional discourses. The field data was combined with documentary sources to analyse methodological triangulation to improve credibility and depth of study. These techniques clearly state that Longhorn Miao’s identity negotiation has improved accurately. Additionally, it provides a holistic knowledge of Suojia Ecomuseum, which functions as an interactive theatre in which Longhorn Miao identity is continuously negotiated and restructured through interactions with external audiences.

RESULTS

Sociocultural and Self-Identities Development of 'Miao' in Suojia Community from the Beginning to 2024

Through the geographical locations, the Miao comprise of ethnic group and multiple subgroups. The Longhorn Miao were transmitted and settled in unique regions after adapting to the local geography and climatic conditions. Beyond their ecological resources, they slowly created a different set of cultural practices that distinguished them from various ethnic and Miao subgroups by placing their cultural system. The 12 Miao villages were situated in a similar geographical area and shared the same ecological practices in the Suojia community, are shown in Figure 1. All the groups of villages are constructed to be part of Suojia Ecomuseum (Zhou, 2002). The Suojia Ecomuseum, built upon the unique culture of the Longhorn Miao, is not a single architectural structure but a cultural community. The area inhabited by the Longhorn Miao, as introduced by the Suojia Ecomuseum, is collectively referred to as the Suojia community. This community is not merely a physical or administrative unit; rather, it is a cultural regional collective space formed by people who share a common culture and who have gathered and settled within the same geographical area. Shared ancestry, spiritual values, ways of life, and mutual dependence bind these inhabitants together. The Suojia community represents a fusion of distinctive historical, cultural, and environmental traditions (Liu et al., 2005). The Suojia community is located at 105°41'E longitude and 26°44'N latitude, approximately 40 kilometers from the center of the Liuzhi Special District government and 3.5 kilometers from the Suojia Township government. It is distributed across the mountainous areas of Suojia, including twelve natural villages: Gaoxing Zhai, Xiaobatian Zhai, Longjia Zhai, Anzhu Zhai (Upper and Lower), Xinfazhai, Dawan Xinzai, and Bukong Zhai in Liuzhi Special District, as well as Yizhong Dizhai, Damaozhai, Xiaoxing Zhai, Houzhai, and Huadong Zhai in Zhijin County (Zhang, 2000).

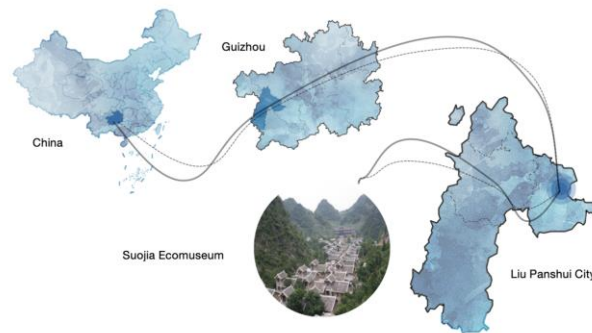


Figure 1: The map illustrates the location of the Suojia Ecomuseum and the Suojia community, highlighting the ecological environment as an important factor influencing the development of the Longhorn Miao lifestyle (Source: Researcher, 2025).

Surrounding these community villages are populations of four ethnic groups: Yi, Miao, Hui, and Han. The Longhorn Miao population totals just over 5,000. Due to their long-term habitation in remote mountainous areas with relatively limited external contact, they have managed to preserve a rich array of traditional ethnic cultural resources (Shu, 2023). The Suojia Ecomuseum building is situated in Gaoxing Village of the Suojia community. Gaoxing Village comprises four villages: Longjia Zhai, Xiaobatian Zhai, Gaoxing Zhai, and Bukong Zhai. These four villages collectively form one administrative village, with distances between them not exceeding two kilometers. Each village functions as a villager group, with the highest authority within each village being the villager group leader (Fang, 2010). The Suojia community is located in the plateau region of Guizhou, characterised by steep mountains, infertile land, scarce water resources, and a typical karst landform. Combined with the subtropical monsoon humid climate, these natural conditions have profoundly shaped the Longhorn Miao's patterns of livelihood, cultural expressions, and social organisation. Hu (2015), state that the community has around 12 villages with difficult conditions and less transportation infrastructure, which have less interaction with the outside world. The tradition of the Longhorn Miao has been improved with autonomy, and protecting its different ethnic characteristics over generations. Additionally, the supporting factor of Longhorn Miao's separated mountain-side settlement patterns, Suojia's natural environment, enhances the development of a farming style and separate agricultural system. Whereas, the productive and economic systems are changed by their social structures and cultural aspects (Shan, 2011). For example, their spiritual beliefs, cooking style, hairstyles, and ethnic culture relate both to the natural surroundings and unique artistic creations. The interaction between the environmental and social elements created a different cultural system and ecology. Due to the increase in external factors, difficulties have arisen in protecting the cultural ecology by developing the community. Additionally, the idea of the ecomuseum was initiated as a framework to combine both cultural protection and social advancement. Originating in 1971 in Europe, the Ecomuseum concept was the product of decades of accumulated social, economic, and cultural challenges in the 1960s and 1970s, and the result of prolonged debates within the museum

sector on the role of museums in contemporary society. It highlights the holistic preservation and conservation of the culture in its environmental context, allowing communities to sustain heritage interaction world-wide (Liang, 1999). Within the interconnected societal framework of contemporary China and globalization-driven framework, the Longhorn Miao's specific socio-cultural ecosystem is gradually adapted to modern influences, as illustrated in Figure 2. At the same time, its uniqueness has been recognized internationally, affirming its status as a region of exceptional socio-cultural value embedded within its ecological system (Li & Zhou, 2023). In this context, the Suojia community has been incorporated into the Sino-Norwegian collaborative project of the Suojia Eco-Museum. Since the establishment of the Suojia Ecomuseum, the Longhorn Miao's ecological environment, agricultural production, economic activities, infrastructure, healthcare, and education have gradually integrated into mainstream society, generating a phenomenon of cultural fusion (Xiang, 2024). This fusion is not a process of simple assimilation but rather an interweaving and restructuring of local culture with external social and cultural influences, resulting in new cultural forms.



Figure 2: Chinese President Jiang Zemin and King Harald V of Norway jointly attend the signing ceremony for the Guizhou Ecomuseum Cluster Project (Source: image courtesy of Suojia Ecomuseum, 2024).

Eco-museum has created a hybrid or “in-between” space in which the Longhorn Miao can maintain their traditional lives by engaging in research, exhibition and exchange-oriented activities which are associated with the eco-museum. Because of this dual engagement, their culture is both conserved and continually reshaped within a new social context, allowing it to become integrated into wider socio-cultural life. This approach has stimulated cultural innovation and transformation within the Suojia community and generated distinctive forms of cultural expression and representation that deeply grounded in local identity.

Longhorn Miao: Uniqueness of Self-Ethnic Identity in Suojia Community

Culture of the Longhorn Miao has shaped the unique ecological environment and rich, intricate cultural system. Meanwhile, the Suojia Eco- Museum fully represents the culture complexity, selective and reconstructive processes and cultural representation. This approach extends beyond by creating an aesthetic appealing displays; it also impacts how the Longhorn Miao understand their own identity and how it reflects by external audiences. By showcasing all chosen cultural elements, the Longhorn Miao transform these features into markers of self-identification, and the Suojia eco-museum becomes a central site for both cultural presentation and the construction of ethnic identity. Among these representations, bodily performance emerges as one of the most visual compelling and symbolically meaningful expressions of Longhorn Miao culture. The Longhorn headdress is the most iconic feature. It is built from a wooden horn wrapped with strands of ancestral hair from intertwined with black hemp fibers, as illustrated in Figure 3. Women collect their fallen hair each day, and once it has collected enough it was braided together with hemp to form the headdress. Through generations, the process merges the hair of mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers into the single piece, and creates both a memorial to the ancestors and a tangible thread linking the spirits and destinies of multiple generations. The headdress holds the layered meanings: it is marker of ethnic identity, a connection of ancestral traditions and recognize the visual symbol for outside audiences (Fang, 2010).



Figure 3: Longhorn Miao women's attire receives more frequent external attention due to its prominent colors and headwear (Source: Researcher, 2024).

Closely connected to the longhorn headdress is the craftsmanship of Longhorn Miao attire. The embroidery, weaving techniques, and patterned which requires extensive labour carry both functional and symbolic significance. Every garment reflects patience, skill and cultural knowledge. Within the Eco-museum, these clothes operate as both visual and tactile forms, which functions as an everyday custom and staged performance (Liu, 2018). In the Eco-museum, daily activities such as music making and water carrying are not simply documented but it reveals the aesthetic and cultural value (Zhang, 2005). For example, a traditional instrument played during agricultural work, festivals, and informal gatherings. Its sound is intertwined with the rhythms of daily labor and the emotional fabric of the community. When performed for visitors, the flute becomes both a demonstration of musical skill and an audible emblem of cultural heritage. Similarly, the wooden water-carrying bucket, once a purely functional tool for women in a water-scarce environment, has been recontextualized as a cultural object reflecting the ingenuity of the Suojia community in adapting to mountainous terrain (Fang, 2010). Demonstrations of water carrying for visitors transform a routine chore into a symbolic act, imbuing it with performative value (Yang et al., 2024). This shift means that residents begin to view their daily actions through the lens of cultural display, a change that may boost pride but also alters the spontaneity and practicality of these behaviors. Thus, the formation of self-identity depends not only on the content of what is displayed but also on how the act of display redefines the meaning of everyday practices. Unlike the continuous flow of daily life, the religious beliefs and festivals of the Longhorn Miao fall into the category of 'special life' because of their ritualistic and temporally distinctive nature. These customs, though less frequent, hold irreplaceable spiritual meaning and social functions. They express a collective reverence for nature, ancestors, and supernatural forces, while reaffirming the community's history, moral structure, and sense of identity. Bu Chi, a unique Longhorn Miao recording tool, reveals patterns in the activities of spirits and deities over time, enabling people to avoid harmful encounters and maintain safety in daily life. The interpretive authority over Bu Chi rests with the ritual specialist, who uses it to guide decisions on marriage, funerals, and other matters of both spiritual and physical well-being (Fang, 2017). Unlike carved bamboo records, which document past events, Bu Chi encodes a temporal and spiritual logic that reflects the community's cosmological understanding of time and seasonal cycles. The Tiaohua Festival, by contrast, is a large-scale community event combining religious rituals, courtship practices, and collective celebrations. Traditionally, it is a crucial venue for reinforcing social bonds and passing cultural knowledge across generations (Zhang, 2021). Within the Eco-museum, the festivals gain an additional layer for cultural spectacle for visitors and a vivid expression of Longhorn Miao vitality. This dual role transforms festivals and ritual crafts into staged cultural capital, shaping how performers perceive and reinterpret their own traditions.

The Process of Coexistence of 'Self-Identity of Longhorn Miao' in the Context of In-Between Ethnicity and the Part of "Suojia Ecomuseum"

The richness and uniqueness of the Longhorn Miao culture have long constituted the core foundation of the group's ethnic identity (Wang, 2002). The Suojia Eco- Museum presents not the full breadth of Longhorn Miao culture but curated a form of ethnic identity production, shaping both community self-perception and external understanding. Selectively, it highlights specific cultural symbols such as longhorn headdresses, embroidery, and festive costumes it constructs a recognizable cultural image for outside visitors. Visual term allows the Longhorn Miao to stand out in multicultural environment. Meanwhile, the emphasis has less visible cultural aspects such as oral heritage, farming practices, moral values and community dynamics that are harder to present in short exhibitions. Consequently, the display strengthens the group's identity through externalized symbols while

reducing the richness and depth of its internal cultural life. Similarly, the elements selected for display gain higher value within the national cultural policy and tourism economics, increasingly community itself defines the core culture. This views a broader “politics of display” where decisions about inclusion or exclusion are shaped by audience expectations, exhibition constraints, policy agendas, international cultural exchange, and internal community consensus (Macdonald, 1998). Rituals are closely connected with religious beliefs are often minimized to fit public cultural norms, while factors such as list of intangible cultural heritage are prioritized and leads to reconstructed symbolic system that favors visibility in external contexts and strengthens cultural symbols with the community. Suojia Eco- Museum exhibition practices, activities once confined to private or family spaces have gradually shifted into the public sphere. Handcraft activities such as embroidery and weaving are shown in Figure 4, which are originally confined to intimate domestic contexts, and are now performed on public stages, where external audiences can observe or even participate. This shift toward public presentation transforms cultural practices from mere ways of life into significant symbols and means of expressing ethnic identity (Li et al., 2023).



Figure 4: Villagers in the Suojia community demonstrate clothing and wax-painting techniques to visitors inside their own homes. As a result, the interior arrangements of their houses are also freely observed by tourists, reflecting the phenomenon of private spaces becoming public (Source: Researcher, 2024).

At the same time, cultural behaviors and material forms that once carried the lived experiences, historical memories, and spiritual practices of the Longhorn Miao have been aestheticized, selected, and reproduced to meet the demands of the market, ultimately entering systems of circulation, consumption, and commercial operation as cultural products. Everyday practices and objects have been redesigned into commercial products, and the longhorn headdress functions as a creative symbol. In this process, culture has transformed into inherited marketable social asset that can be packed, sold, disseminated and capitalized. The Longhorn Miao community reshapes the logic of the community’s self-identification. The staging of festivals is concentrated of this transformation. For example, the Tiaohua Festival, within the museum’s exhibition framework views the visual and emotional impact for the celebration but weakens its religious expression within the community. This shift shows how ethnic identity is increasingly staged and reinterpreted in modern society and Suojia Eco- Museum utilizes digital platforms to broadcast Longhorn Miao cultural symbols (Yi, 2025). This global dissemination not only creates new spaces for recognition of Longhorn Miao culture in transregional contexts but also allows external feedback to directly influence the internal construction of identity. For example, in 2025, a delegation of Longhorn Miao representatives traveled beyond their community to present dance, music, and interactive craft workshops on an international cultural exchange stage, offering overseas audiences a direct experience of Longhorn Miao culture. Such cross-cultural interactions strengthen cultural pride among community members and consolidate the visibility and value of ethnic identity in the global cultural arena are shown in Figure 5. At the same time, the Suojia Ecomuseum’s collaborations with cultural institutions, enterprises, and academic organizations at home and abroad facilitate the dissemination and creative reinterpretation of ethnic identity on both scholarly and industrial platforms.

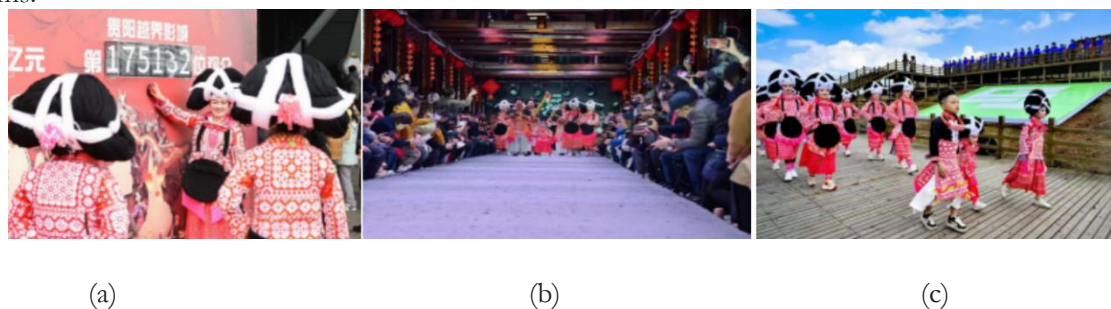


Figure 5: Selected examples of Longhorn Miao cultural displays outside the community in 2025: (a) promotion for a popular film in Guiyang, Guizhou; (b) public runway showcasing intangible cultural heritage costumes for global audiences; (c) a state-guided ethnic outreach case combining cultural tourism and policy initiatives (Source: Zhu Wenying, 2025).

'Suojia Ecomuseum' in the Dimension of Theater of Interaction and Negotiating Minority Identity.

The Suojia Ecomuseum, as a unique cultural practice site, not only undertakes the task of preserving and exhibiting Longhorn Miao culture but also constructs a "Theater of Interaction" where multiple stakeholders, the gazers (external visitors), the gazed-upon (Longhorn Miao community), and the coordinators (including museum staff, local administrators, and cultural mediators), collectively participate in an ongoing process of identity construction and reproduction are shown in figure 6. This interactive model is first enabled by the spatial uniqueness of the Ecomuseum. Unlike traditional museums with closed and static displays, the Suojia Ecomuseum embeds exhibitions into the fabric of community life, intertwining exhibition spaces with everyday living scenes (Dong & Wu, 2025). Visitors not only see physical artifacts and visual materials but also directly enter Longhorn Miao living environments, such as family courtyards, festival venues, and production workshops. This openness and immersive quality turn cultural display into more than object presentation; it becomes a staging and contextualization of life itself, offering more opportunities for direct interaction between the gazers and the gazed-upon. Meanwhile, the complexity of cultural display is highlighted within this spatial form. The exhibition of Longhorn Miao culture involves issues of performance authenticity, how to maintain cultural integrity while meeting external aesthetic demands, and the politics of display (Li & Wu, 2016; Yao, 2022). For example, the selection of cultural element was impacted through national cultural policies, tourism development and international exchange. Within this spatial and display conditions, three main groups such as gazers, gazed-upon and coordinators form a specific interactive relationship. Gazers, include tourists, researchers, and cultural consumers, actively views exhibition contents through interpretation and feedbacks. In Longhorn Miao community, gazed-upon negotiates between authentic and aesthetic transformation, while coordinators mediate expectations, interpret culture, manage benefits, and hold significant control over narrative power and exhibition structure.



Figure 6: Multi-stakeholder interactions at the Suojia Ecomuseum are illustrated, showing the participation of Longhorn Miao performers, visitors, educational programs, and external media coverage (Source: Xiong T, 2025; Liuzhi Media, 2025).

However, behind these visible displays lie invisible power structures and negotiation logics. Decisions about which cultural contents are included, neglected, or marginalised are jointly influenced by macro policy directions, funding sources, tourism market trends, and internal community power relations. This unseen contest reveals that identity is not simply cultural heritage but a result of intertwined interests, power, and symbolic capital. As the exhibition logic of the Suojia Ecomuseum continues to evolve, the modes of displaying Longhorn Miao culture have undergone a transformation from localization to globalization (Yi, 2025). Initially, exhibitions emphasized locality and everyday life, directly immersing audiences in community life. In the contemporary context, digital dissemination and new media technologies have greatly expanded the visibility of Longhorn Miao ethnic identity. Through online platforms, short videos, and virtual exhibitions, cultural symbols transcend geographical boundaries and enter the global cultural market. This form of dissemination not only changes the composition of gazers but also reciprocally impacts the community's internal identity construction. The Suojia Eco- Museum, as a theater of interaction, has become an essential arena for the formation and development of Longhorn Miao ethnic identity. It functions not only as a platform for cultural preservation and display but also as a social stage for community members to interact with external society and negotiate their identities. By analyzing the space, the complexity of cultural displays, the interaction of multiple stakeholders, and underlying power structures, we gain a deeper understanding of minority ethnic identity as a dynamic, negotiated, and continually reproduced process

within globalization and modernization contexts. The summary of key findings of this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Key Aspects and Findings

Aspect	Summary of Findings
Research Focus	Examines the identity of the Miao people in the context of the Liuzhi Suojia Ecomuseum and its interactions with visitors.
Methodology	Qualitative research employs bibliographic and field research techniques.
Identity Representation	The everyday practices and rituals of the Longhorn Miao are observed and interpreted by external visitors, influencing their cultural identity.
Role of Ecomuseum	Serves as a performance space for self-presentation and interaction with outsiders, showcasing Suojia ethnic identity.
Cultural Performance	Cultural expressions cater to community life and outside observer expectations, leading to a complex identity negotiation.
Dynamic Process	Continuous negotiation of the Miao's self-identities occurs between the Longhorn Miao, consumers, and other stakeholders.
Research Contribution	Expands Ecomuseum studies by framing it as a site of identity negotiation and cultural politics, rather than just heritage preservation.
Keywords	Suojia Ecomuseum, Ethnic Identity, Theater of Interaction, Identity Negotiation

DISCUSSION

The Suojia Ecomuseum as an Interactive Theater and in the Eyes of the Nation State

The Suojia Ecomuseum is not a naturally emergent cultural space but rather a deliberately designed and constructed interactive theatre. In selecting case studies, the International Ecomuseum Organisation sought communities with distinctive cultural and regional characteristics to fulfil its planning objectives, eventually choosing Suojia. Meanwhile, it is not practical to develop an ecomuseum in Suojia: it needs cooperation agreements and guidance from the state government. It is a delicate process for the Longhorn Miao community to interact with state power, foreign organisations, expectations, and governmental authority. Within the national context, state power directly intervened in the performance displays, cultural content selection, and organizational arrangements of the museum, differentiating it from typical international ecomuseums. International cases generally prioritize ecological and artistic value, visitor demands, and the vision of the organizing body. State intervention in china reshapes the cultural gaze into a triadic structure, adding government mediation to the 'observer- observed' dynamic. Consequently, negotiations in the Suojia Ecomuseum occur not only in between the Longhorn Miao and international organizations but also under state regulation, Whereas, Suojia Eco-Museum has distinct political and bureaucratic characteristics.

The Multi-Party Negotiation and Increasing Complexity of Longhorn Miao Cultural Identity

Following the construction of the Suojia Ecomuseum, the cultural identity of the Longhorn Miao has become increasingly complex. Traditionally, the bilateral negotiations within the community and with the state or other groups identify and maintain cultural continuity. However, the involvement of international eco-museum bodies and external audiences have transformed this into a multi-party process. This expanded framework implies that Longhorn Miao identity is no longer solely the product of dialogue between the community and the state, but is simultaneously shaped by the cultural expectations of international organizations, the gaze of audiences, and the regulatory interventions of government authorities. The interweaving of these multiple forces continuously reshapes and recalibrates identity through processes of display and practice, resulting in a more complex and dynamic configuration. This process demonstrates that, within the ecomuseum context, minority cultural identity is not merely the outcome of internal cultural consciousness, but rather a socio-cultural construct negotiated and generated under the influence of diverse external forces.

Self-Ethnic and Social Life under the Shadow of Ecomuseum

The Suojia community has long shaped Miao cultural life through traditions that transformed across dynastic and social contexts, collaborating inherited practices with modern influences. Within Suojia Eco-museum's construction, some of the cultural elements of the Longhorn Miao were selectively extracted, preserved, and redefined for external display. By curating these particular aspects of traditions from their natural evolution, ability to adapt ongoing social and temporal change was limited. Through this process, the Longhorn Miao's original way of life was transformed into a performative mode, creating an interplay between daily practices and staged display. What was once organically shaped by the interaction of ecology, social relations, resources, and cultural adaptation has, under the mechanisms of the ecomuseum, been solidified into an object of exhibition and external gaze. This

solidification not only constrains the internal expression of culture but also reshapes Longhorn Miao identity, as daily life itself becomes part of a cultural performance for external audiences. Consequently, the Longhorn Miao are positioned simultaneously as cultural bearers and as active participants in the performance of their own traditions.

The Really life and Performance of Cultural Identity in Everyday Life

In the Suojia Eco-museum's display mechanisms, Longhorn Miao residents are required to fix and formalize elements of their culture to present external audiences. Within the display mechanisms of the Suojia Eco-Museum, residents of the Longhorn Miao community are required to fix and formalize elements of their culture to present them to external audiences. Longhorn Miao historical culture encompassed both ordinary and extraordinary aspects of life. The eco-museum's intervention disrupts the balance by elevating remarkable-life elements into daily routines. As a result, flexible aspects of ordinary life are replaced, by projecting cultural identity into everyday living. This process transforms everyday life itself into a site of cultural performance. For instance, Longhorn Miao women traditionally wore horn-shaped headdresses only during specific festivals or rituals. However, under the influence of the ecomuseum, they are now expected to wear such elaborate attire even in routine activities, to satisfy the gaze of visitors and the requirements of museum display. In this performative context, cultural identity that once belonged exclusively to remarkable life is transposed into ordinary life, which becomes staged and symbolized, while the more private and natural aspects of lived experience retreat from public view. Thus, the Suojia Ecomuseum not only preserves and amplifies the cultural practices of remarkable life but also embeds cultural identity into everyday life through mechanisms of performance and display.

Ethnic Cultural Heroes and the Commodification of Culture

Within the Suojia Ecomuseum's display system, the stage is divided into a 'large stage' and a 'small stage,' corresponding to the collective sphere of the twelve villages in the Suojia community and the performative spaces of festive occasions, such as the Huashan Festival. The dynamics of gaze and negotiation unfold on different levels across these stages. On the 'small stage' of festival performances, the cultural presentation of the Longhorn Miao is more refined, and the sense of cultural identity becomes more intensified, accompanied by music, dance, and other performative practices. At the same time, authoritative figures in different domains are elevated into 'cultural heroes,' representing the most salient and distinctive cultural symbols of the Longhorn Miao. It is essential to recognize that these cultural heroes are not pre-existing entities, but rather are produced and recognized through the process of interaction and display, their identities embodying the symbolic construction of cultural authority. The making of cultural heroes involves multiple strategies and channels, including media representation, online cultural reproduction, and dissemination through short-video platforms such as TikTok. Audience feedback and commentary generate a secondary gaze, further reinforcing the social recognition and cultural status of these figures. This process is simultaneously intertwined with cultural commodification: through performance and circulation, cultural heroes transform Longhorn Miao traditions into consumable symbols and products, generating both economic and cultural effects. Consequently, the display mechanisms of the Suojia Ecomuseum not only construct cultural heroes but also advance the commodification of culture, reflecting the complex interplay between cultural identity, performative representation, and economic value in the context of modernity.

The Fragility of Ethnic Cultural Identity in the Modern Context: The Politics of Protection and Consumption in the Ecomuseum

In the modern context, Longhorn Miao cultural identity at the Suojia Eco-Museum shows both distinct and notable fragility. Harsh climate and limited accessibility have long required resilience to sustain traditional life, yet modern conveniences risk disrupting these rhythms and weakening cultural continuity. This fragile has highly distinctive identity which has external attention and consumption, creating the need for institutionalized cultural protection. Similarly, in the modern era, these traditions are now exposed to outside gazes and market pressures, making protection a political as well as cultural process. In Suojia, international eco-museum bodies, state institutions, and the community form a triangular relationship in shaping display and preservation strategies, exemplified by John Jägerström's argued that modern influences such as girls' education could erode traditional culture (Hu, 2015). This reveals the interventionist intentions embedded in international perspectives on cultural preservation. Moreover, the Chinese took some practices such as establishing schools and health clinics, fixing water shortages and constructing roads. Also, enhancing the living conditions and demonstrating political regulation among the cultural preservation and modernisation. Thus, in the context of modernization, the protection and display of ethnic cultural identity within the Suojia Ecomuseum necessitate a delicate negotiation not only between cultural values and economic interests but also among international organisations, state power, and local communities. This political logic ultimately determines the cultural content, forms of representation, and scope of protection within the ecomuseum.

CONCLUSION

This research states that Suojia Ecomuseum not only protects the culture but also preserves the diverse complex phenomena in Longhorn Miao, which continuously redefine their authenticity. There is an interaction between community residents, museum administrators, and consumers in Suojia to restructure and adapt their external expectations. The Suojia ecomuseum reveals both the static ethic image and displays the dynamic negotiation process that accommodates cultural differences, recognises variety, and facilitates connection. This study emphasises that the Ecomuseum plays a dual role. It is both a stage for collective cultural representation and a medium for individual self-expression. Externally, the identity of the Longhorn Miao is disseminated, validated, and commodified in ways that integrate the community into broader cultural and economic frameworks. Internally, cultural self-awareness is cultivated and reshaped through active participation, creative adaptation, and intergenerational transmission. In this sense, the Suojia Ecomuseum transcends the limitations of a traditional exhibition hall, becoming a crucial platform for the modern transformation of ethnic culture and the fluidity of social identity. These findings show that Suojia Eco-museum not only displays the function of an ecomuseum but also reveals its role in cultural preservation, production, negotiation, and tourism growth. It highlights the ethnic culture and redefines the context by offering valuable insights and discussing the connection between ecomuseum and heritage studies.

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