



彝  
声  
Voices of  
Roots

Community-based  
Endangered  
Language  
Revitalization

In Nisu Yi Community,  
Yunnan, China





**Guantao Yi (Tao)**  
**MA Service Design24-25**

# Acknowledgement

Over the past fifteen months in the MA Service Design programme at UAL, I began my journey into service design—a journey that sparked my passion for the field. The theories and practices I encountered have continually shaped my development as a designer.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Cordula Friedlander, for her patient guidance, thoughtful feedback, and open-minded approach throughout my Final Major Project. Her support enabled me to explore and enjoy the possibilities of service design within my chosen context.

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Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my parents, whose unwavering support has accompanied me throughout my studies abroad and strengthened our mutual understanding and growth.



# Abstract

This project applies service design to the context of endangered language revitalization in rural China, focusing on Yongning and Renhou villages in Mengzi City, Yunnan Province. In collaboration with the Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre (NYECC), the author conducted extensive field research and multiple prototypings with the local Nisu Yi community.

The project aims to reorganize and activate existing but fragmented cultural and linguistic resources within the community and NYECC, and to establish a year-round service design system that supports sustainable language revitalization. This system integrates various touchpoints—including a community-based language celebration, a digital language archive, a community reflection diary, workshop documentation templates, and urban communication materials—to enhance the visibility and everyday use of the Nisu Yi language.

By centering local knowledge, community agency, and intergenerational participation, the project positions language revitalization not only as the preservation of words and sounds, but as a process of cultural reactivation, identity rebuilding, and long-term community engagement.

**ENDANGERED** ual: london college  
of communication



**LANGUAGES**



彝声  
Voices of  
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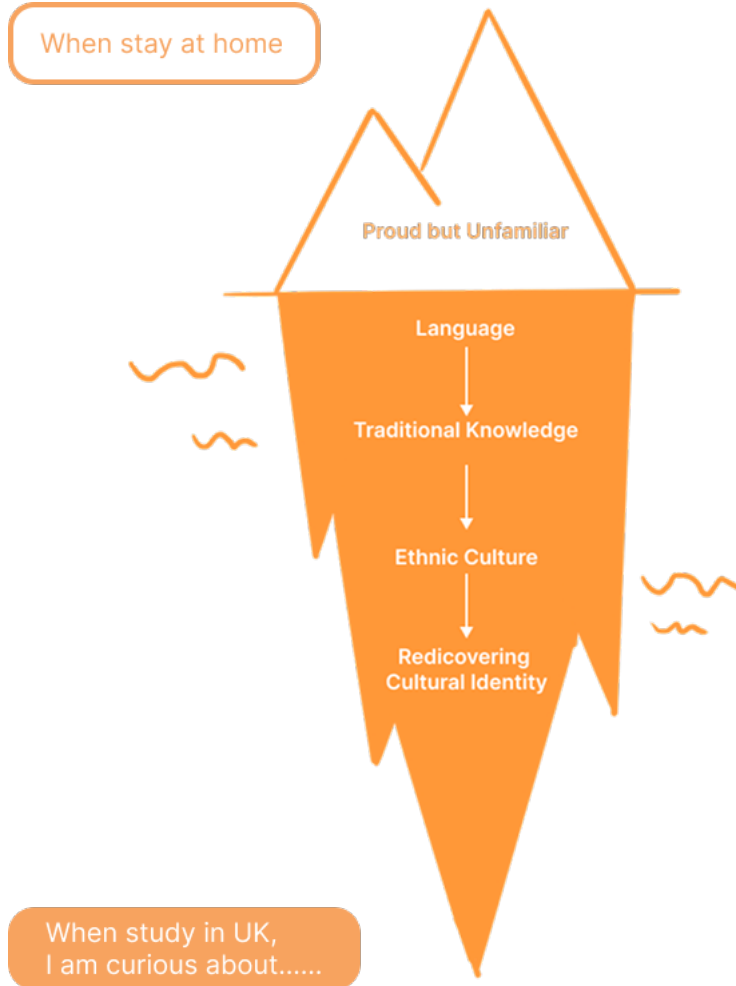
**REVITALIZATION**

Nisu Yi Community

In Yongning & Renhou Village, Yunnan, China

Degree Show Poster

# Why did I begin this journey?



This project began with a conversation. When I first arrived in London, I always introduced myself by saying: “Hi! I’m Tao, I’m from China, and I belong to the Yi ethnic minority.” I took pride in this identity until one day a classmate asked me, “What does ‘ethnic minority’ mean? What makes you different from Han people?”

I answered confidently—our food, clothing, festivals, and language. But at that moment, I realised I didn’t know my own ethnic language. The blankness led me to question my sense of identity: Am I truly Yi? Do I understand my community at all?

These personal questions opened up broader reflections: Why is linguistic diversity in China declining? How does mainstream culture marginalise minority languages? Who is still working to keep these languages alive?

Guided by these questions, I decided to use service design to create a culturally grounded language revitalisation system for minority communities—starting with my own.

Over six months of research and fieldwork, I have grown closer to my heritage. I began learning the Nisu Yi and sang Yi songs with villagers.

I realised this journey is not only an academic project—it is about reconnecting with my culture, learning my mother tongue, and building deeper emotional bonds with the Yi community.

Language is more than communication; it carries culture, memory, and identity. It ties families and communities together through shared emotions and belonging.

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***BACKGROUND***

# Chinese Context

## What Are Ethnic Minorities (“Shao shù mín zú”) in China? What Is the Yi Ethnic Group?

China is home to nearly 114 million ethnic minority people, making it one of the countries with the largest minority populations in the world. From another perspective, the Chinese government officially recognises 56 ethnic groups. Among them, the Han people constitute the majority with a population of around 1.22 billion, while the other 55 minority groups together account for only 8.5% of the national population (Maurer-Fazio and Hasmath, 2015).

The ethnic group explored in this project is the Yi people, which is also the researcher’s own ethnic group. As one of the seven largest ethnic minorities in China, the Yi population exceeded 9.8 million in 2020 (Abuya, no date). According to data provided by the Nisu Cultural Centre of the Yi community in Mengzi, Yunnan Province, the Yi people consist of 81 subgroups, each with its own linguistic variations due to the group’s wide geographical distribution.

The fieldwork in this project focuses on the Nisu subgroup. During visits to the community, it was noted that most villagers refer to themselves in their own language as “Nisumo.” The official term “Nisu” emerged from minor variations in oral transmission over time, and the government later standardised it as the formal subgroup name. In the following sections, the term “Nisu Yi people” or “Nisu Yi community” is used in alignment with this official classification.

## Linguistic Landscape of China and the Current Situation of Non-Han Languages

China is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, where Mandarin Chinese functions as the national lingua franca. Linguistically, China’s languages can broadly be divided into three groups (See Figure 01).

Although many minority languages remain active, a large number are now on the brink of extinction. According to Jinfang Li and Yongxian Luo (2022), in *The Language of China*, there are 128 languages in China other than Chinese itself. Among these, 64 languages have more than 10,000 speakers, 48 languages have between 5,000 and 10,000 speakers, and 11 languages have between 100 and 4,900 speakers. Based on the number of native speakers, about half of China’s minority languages are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, and are therefore considered endangered or critically endangered.

Category	Description	Example
Sinitic Varieties (Chinese Dialects)	Belong to the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family; mutually intelligible to varying degrees.	Cantonese, Hakka, Shanghai Dialect
Ethnic Minority Languages	Belong to other language families with distinct phonetic and grammatical systems.	Tibetan, Yi, Zhuang Language
National Standard Language	Mandarin Chinese, based on Northern dialects.	Used in education, media, and government administration.

Figure 01. Categories of Chinese Languages

## The Development of China's Language Policy

To understand China's language policy, the researcher reviewed the work of Huiyu, Yayu, and Haitao(2024), which provides an objective overview of its historical development. Their research explains why the promotion of Mandarin became necessary and how the government has attempted to balance this with the protection of minority languages.

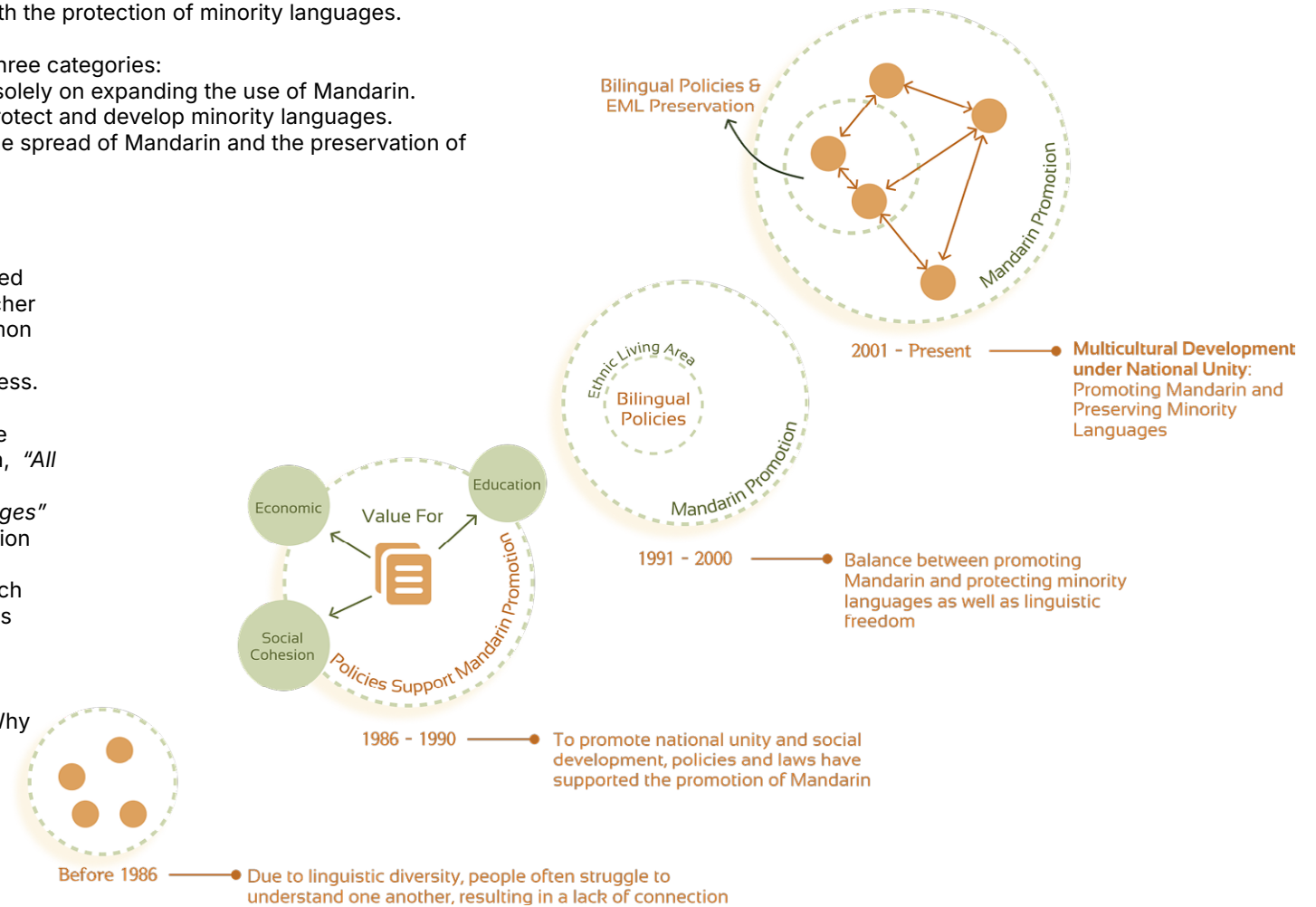
They classify China's language policies into three categories:

1. Policies promoting Mandarin, which focus solely on expanding the use of Mandarin.
2. Minority language policies, which aim to protect and develop minority languages.
3. Bilingual policies, which emphasise both the spread of Mandarin and the preservation of minority languages.

Based on this reading, the researcher's perspective differs from scholars who argue that the promotion of Mandarin has suppressed minority languages(Zhou, 2000). The researcher views the establishment of a functional common language as a necessary part of national development and an objective historical process.

At the same time, according to Article 4 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, "All ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages" (2019). In 2015, the State Language Commission and the Ministry of Education launched the Language Preservation Project (Yu-Bao), which documents endangered minority languages as well as regional varieties.

However, despite these efforts, many non-dominant languages continue to disappear. Why does this occur even under comprehensive policies? This question will be explored in the following section.



My understanding of the history of language policies in China, referenced from *Evolving means of formal language policy on Putonghua and minority languages on the Chinese mainland (1986–2021)*

## Challenges Faced by Non-Dominant Languages in the Chinese Context: Cultural Homogenization

Although China officially adopts a multicultural policy that encourages cultural integration—preserving minority cultures while embracing elements from other groups (Leah Kessler, 2023), the dominant language is continuously reinforced through multiple mechanisms such as policy implementation, educational practices, and social attitudes.

With the modernisation of media, technology, and education, mainstream values and cultural symbols are increasingly adopted, contributing to reduced cultural differences and declining diversity. This process aligns with the concept of cultural homogenization, in which distinct cultures become more similar and gradually lose their uniqueness under the forces of globalisation (Ritzer, 2021).

Mainstream culture further shapes linguistic hierarchies, while minority languages are perceived as outdated or less useful—pushing non-dominant languages to the margins.

From the researcher's own experience, learning mainstream languages such as Mandarin and English has offered greater educational opportunities but also created distance from Yi cultural roots. Within China's framework of cultural integration, preserving minority languages therefore remains a complex and urgent challenge.

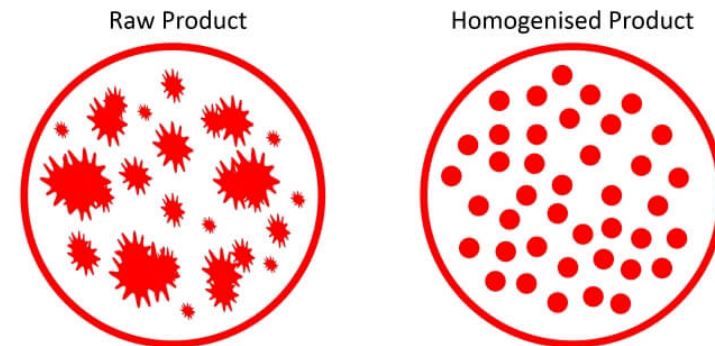


Figure From [https://alliancefluidhandling.com/what\\_is\\_homogenisation/](https://alliancefluidhandling.com/what_is_homogenisation/)

## Research Context

### Research Subjects:

The focus of this study is the Nisu Yi community, a sub-group of the Yi ethnic minority in Yunnan Province, China.

### Geographical Distribution:

The Nisu Yi people are concentrated in the Yongning and Renhou Village, Mengzi City, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan, China. Both villages are located about a 40-minute drive from the city centre of Mengzi, and they represent typical settlements of the Nisu Yi community.

***“Since we have the road to downtown, the language environment has started disappearing.”***

### Major festivals

The community celebrates its own traditional festivals, including the Dragon Worship Festival, Yi New Year, and the Torch Festival. Among them, the Torch Festival is the most lively event of the year, when the entire village gathers together in celebration.



Geographic Map of Research Area

### Linguistic Characteristics:

The Nisu Yi writing system has been lost, so it now exists mainly in oral form. When people need to record or represent it in writing, they often use Chinese characters phonetically.

Therefore, in the later prototype testing phase of this project, some written content—though appearing in Chinese characters—actually represents the phonetic sounds of the Nisu Yi.

### Notes on the Nisu Yi Language Writing System:

One of my local collaborators, Pu, a co-founder of the Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre (NYECC) in Mengzi, has spent more than twenty years learning the unified Yi Language Script in Yunnan.

And Based on the pronunciation of Yongning and Renhou villages, he compiled a Nisu Yi vocabulary book in the unified Yi language Script in Yunnan titled A Comparative Vocabulary of Nisu Yi and Chinese.



Photo of A Comparative Vocabulary of Nisu Yi and Chinese

# ***DESIGN THINKING***

# Field of Study

## Service Design

Service Design focuses on addressing complex socio-cultural challenges through systemic thinking and iterative development. Service Design provides the methodological foundation for this project, encompassing stakeholder engagement, co-creation, prototyping, and the continuous refinement of service touchpoints (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2012).

By adopting this lens, the study explores how service-oriented interventions can support long-term behavioural change, strengthen relationships among stakeholders, and create sustainable infrastructures that enable cultural practices to evolve and persist.

## Language & Cultural Sustainability

A major component of the research concerns endangered language preservation and revitalization, with a specific focus on the Nisu Yi community in Yunnan, China. The study examines the broader global trends of language loss driven by urbanisation, globalisation, and the dominance of major languages, and situates the Nisu context within these dynamics.

Language is approached not simply as a communication system but as an expression of cultural identity, collective memory, and intergenerational continuity (Harrison, 2007).

This project investigates how design-led approaches can support locally grounded language revitalisation efforts by helping communities document, practise, and sustain their linguistic heritage.

## Community-based Design

The project is also informed by principles of community-based and participatory design, which emphasise collaboration, shared decision-making, and respect for local knowledge systems (Escobar, 2018).

This perspective shapes the research methods employed, including co-design workshops, cultural probes, and other participatory activities. Drawing on pluriversal design perspectives, the study challenges universalised solutions and foregrounds the importance of contextually embedded worldviews. Community members are co-creators who actively shape the direction, purpose, and outcomes of the language revitalization process.

# Critical Framework

## Designs for the Pluriverse

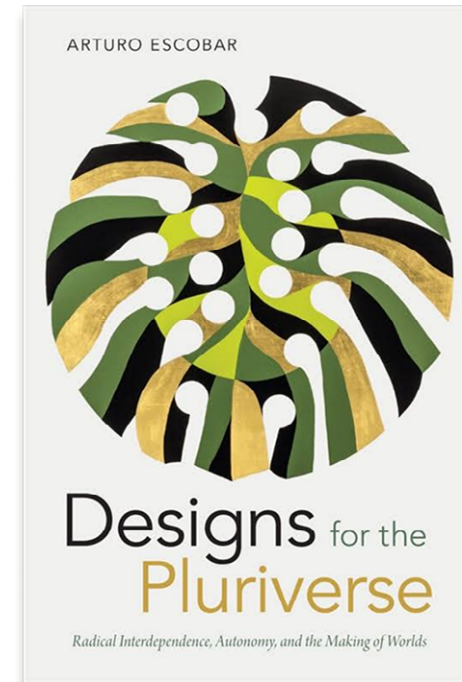
In a pluriversal world, designers are not external problem-solvers but participants who create realities with others. In this project, villagers, NYECC organisers, and government staff all became active co-designers.

In *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Arturo Escobar (2018) critiques the Western-dominated concept of the “One-World World” (OWW)—the idea that we all live within a single, unified reality composed of “one nature” and “many cultures.” Escobar argues that such a worldview conceals the multiplicity and fluidity of the world; it has never been singular or stable. Building on Tim Ingold’s perspective, Escobar calls for designers to move from observing to participating—to understand environments through lived, embodied experience.

### Reflection:

*My year of study in the UK prompted me to re-examine my own design perspective: Which experiences could be translated back to China? Which methods were rooted in Western cultural assumptions and thus required reflection—or even rejection?*

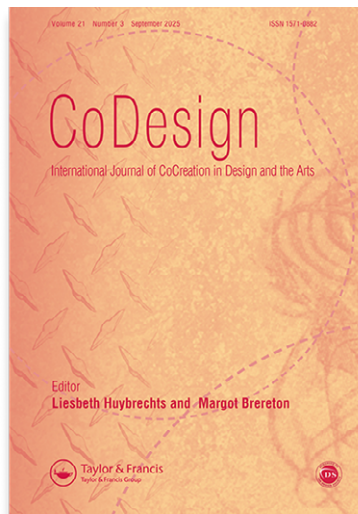
*When applying service design to the revitalization of minority languages in Yunnan, I realized that designers should create a space where local people feel comfortable to express themselves, participate actively, and co-design the pathways of their own linguistic and cultural revitalization.*



## Participatory Design

Participatory design positions end users as active contributors to innovation. As Manzini and Rizzo (2011), it transforms end users—those with real problems and needs—into participants who contribute local knowledge, specific capabilities, and ideas for solutions.

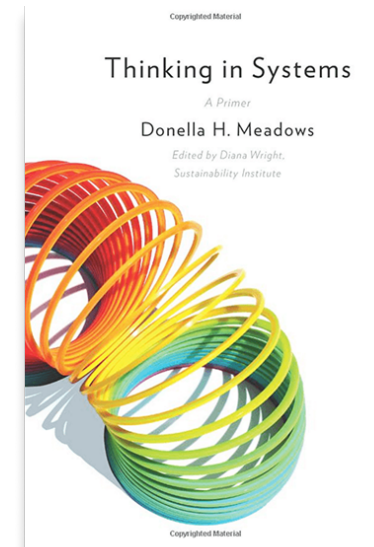
Designers act as mediators, facilitating communication and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and employ various design devices—such as prototypes, models, design games, and other materials—to spark participants' imagination and collective action.



## Reflection:

*Throughout the research and design process, I constantly reminded myself: "Instead of thinking in front of my computer, I should bring those seemingly 'naive' yet open ideas to the community." The reactions and feedback from community members not only enriched the design but also formed the core of co-creation in my project.*

*Although I had previous experience as a facilitator in the Transition Living Lab, early questions remained: When should users be involved? Why initiate participation? What outcomes should be expected? These reflections helped shape a participatory pathway tailored to the Nisu Yi community—grounded in local knowledge, co-creation, and cultural identity.*



## Critical Systems Thinking

Donella Meadows (2009) defines systems thinking as a holistic approach to understanding the mechanisms of complex realities. She argues that societal problems rarely stem from a single actor or event, but rather emerge from the interaction of multiple interconnected factors within a system.

## Reflection:

*In this project, systems thinking offered a structured lens for analysing language loss—not as an isolated issue, but as the result of multiple feedback loops and relationships. This perspective enabled me to map the wider system and design a culturally sustainable, multi-stakeholder service framework.*

# Methodologies

## Double Diamond

The Double Diamond model, proposed by the UK Design Council in 2003, is one of the most commonly used process frameworks in service design. It consists of four stages: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver (Design Council, 2025). It helped the researcher structure the overall timeline of the project, clarify objectives and methods in each phase, and continually reflect on the direction forward.

### Reflection:

*However, I found that real projects rarely follow a strictly linear path. Stages often overlap and iterate, and new insights frequently required me to revisit earlier phases to redefine problems. For me, the Double Diamond functions less as a fixed process and more as a flexible, iterative thinking framework that evolves with the project.*



Figure From <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/the-double-diamond/>

## Learning Through Designing (LtD)

LtD is both a research strategy and a learning attitude: learning through making, reflecting through interaction, and adjusting through co-creation.

Theoretically, it draws on Donald Schön's Reflection-in-Action (1983), which highlights adapting thinking in real time in response to uncertainty, rather than relying solely on pre-existing theories.

### Reflection:

*In the early stages of research, I realised that conventional methods such as interviews or surveys were insufficient for understanding the nuances of rural communities. Instead, I adopted a methodology called Learning Through Designing (LtD)—a process of learning by making, testing, and iterating design artefacts with participants.*

*LtD involves using prototypes as communication tools, enabling designers to learn directly from participants' reactions, behaviours, and interpretations. Through this approach, I continually refined ideas, adjusted directions in real time, and deepened the understanding of cultural practices within the Nisu Yi community.*

## Co-design

Co-design is a methodology of shared creation, where designers, users and stakeholders jointly define problems and develop solutions (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

In this project, co-design was not only a way to gather feedback; it encouraged participants to contribute their knowledge, experiences, and emotions to shape community-centered service solutions.

## Reflection:

*Through co-design, I could observe tacit knowledge and relational networks embedded in the design process, and enable those most familiar with Nisu Yi culture and land to act as agents of change, actively participating in localized design to help safeguard the community's language and culture.*

## Key Tools



# Ethical Framework

## Open Collaboration: Trust

### Ask when uncertain:

As the researcher had never lived in Yongning or Renhou, many local practices differed from her prior experiences. Whenever something was unclear, she asked rather than assumed.

### Attend workshops punctually and support each other's work:

Trust developed through consistent participation. By joining weekly workshops as an active participant, the researcher engaged alongside community members and gradually earned their trust. This research depended on long-term involvement, not brief observation.

### Communicate openly with the partnership; ensure transparency:

The collaboration with NYECC operated as a two-way partnership. Sharing research progress, insights, and outcomes helped sustain transparency and mutual understanding.

## Positionality: Inclusiveness

### Avoid technology dependency:

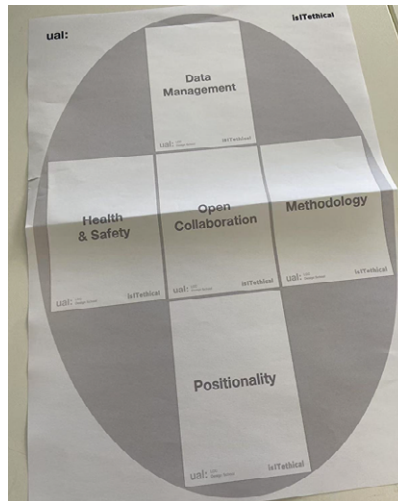
Most participants were older villagers unfamiliar with smartphones, making hands-on co-design and physical artefacts the most effective way to engage them.

### Consider how people and resources interact:

While UK-based projects often involve participants making their own tools, many rural Chinese participants were farmers. The researcher needed to choose materials they felt comfortable and confident using.

### Be selective with information sharing:

Providing too much information can overwhelm participants. Ethical practice requires deciding what is relevant—especially when discussing sensitive topics such as funding or labour—to keep the process focused and manageable.



Toolkit from <https://isitethical.co.uk/isitethical-collaborative-ethical-impact-assessment-cards/>

## Principle: Dignity

### Respect all stakeholders according to their cultural understanding:

Collaborating with the Nisu Yi community required me to understand that their ways of expressing feelings and opinions may differ from those of urban-educated participants. This difference itself reflects their dignity.

### Avoid reproducing stereotypes and cultural assumptions:

"Ethnic minority" should never be equated with being "backward" or "in need of help." Community members hold rich cultural knowledge and are capable contributors.

### Value diverse knowledge and ensure horizontal research methods:

Everyone should have the opportunity to contribute. Local, cultural, and experiential knowledge all played an important role in shaping the researcher's understanding of the community.

# Summary

This project draws on pluriversal design, participatory design, systems thinking, and iterative making to co-create with the Nisu Yi community. Instead of imposing external solutions, the design process centred local knowledge, lived experience, and shared decision-making.

Through continuous prototyping, co-design workshops, and long-term engagement, the project evolved as a flexible, culturally grounded service system that respects dignity, builds trust, and supports community-led language revitalization.

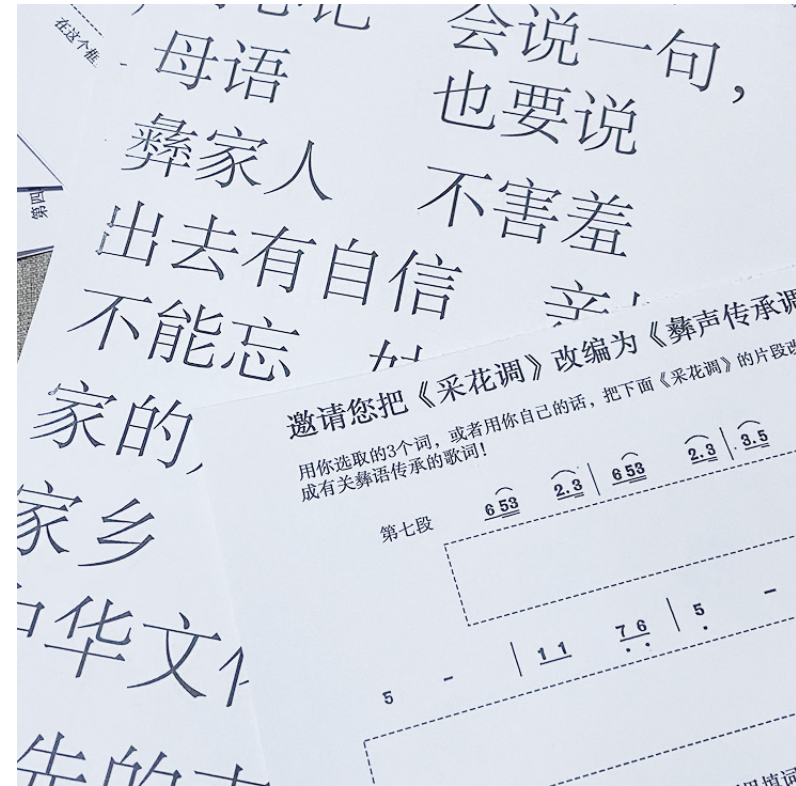
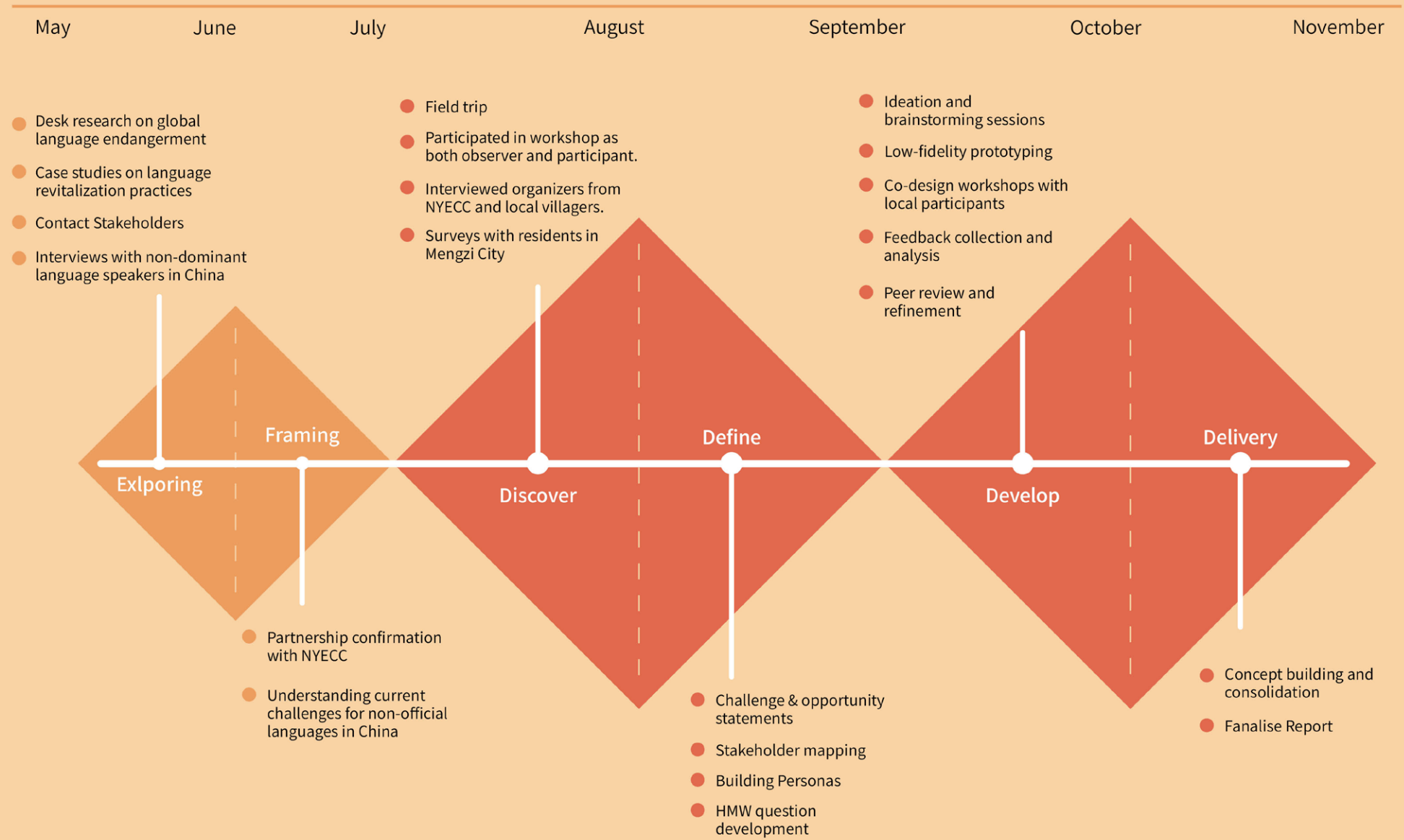
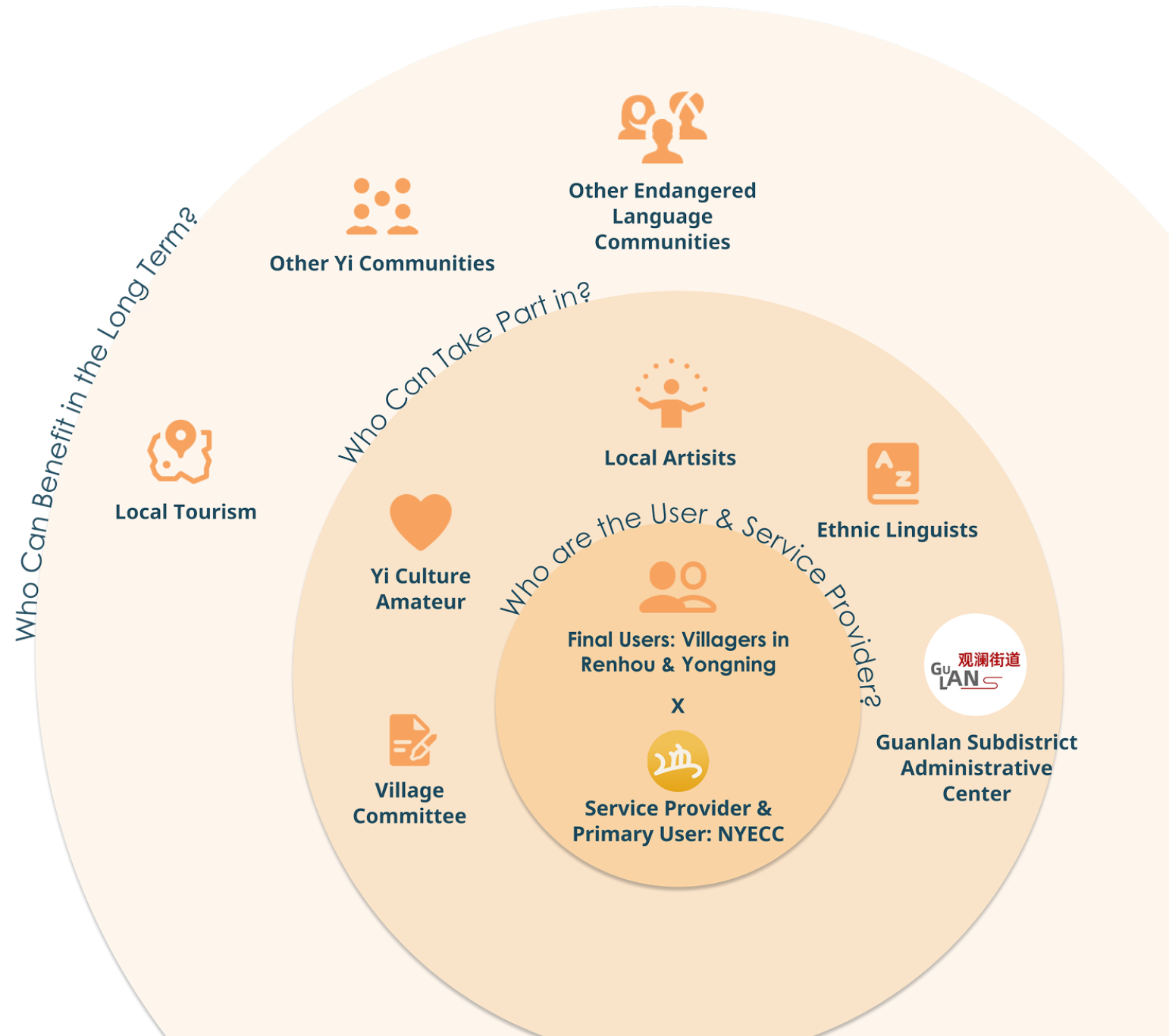


Photo of Prototype Materials

# Timeline



# Stakeholder Map



**01**  
**PROJECT SCOPING**

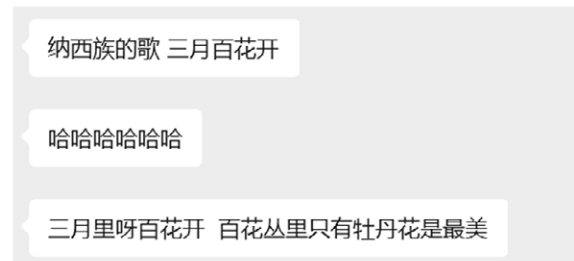
# Initial Research Activities

The initial research activities helped establish a macro understanding and define the project scope.

By engaging with diverse perspectives, the study gained a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by endangered languages and the perceptions of local communities.

- **Desk Research**
- **05 In-depth Online Interviews**
- **05 Case Studies**

*A Naxi song —  
“When flowers bloom  
in March,  
among all blossoms,  
the peony is the most  
beautiful.”*



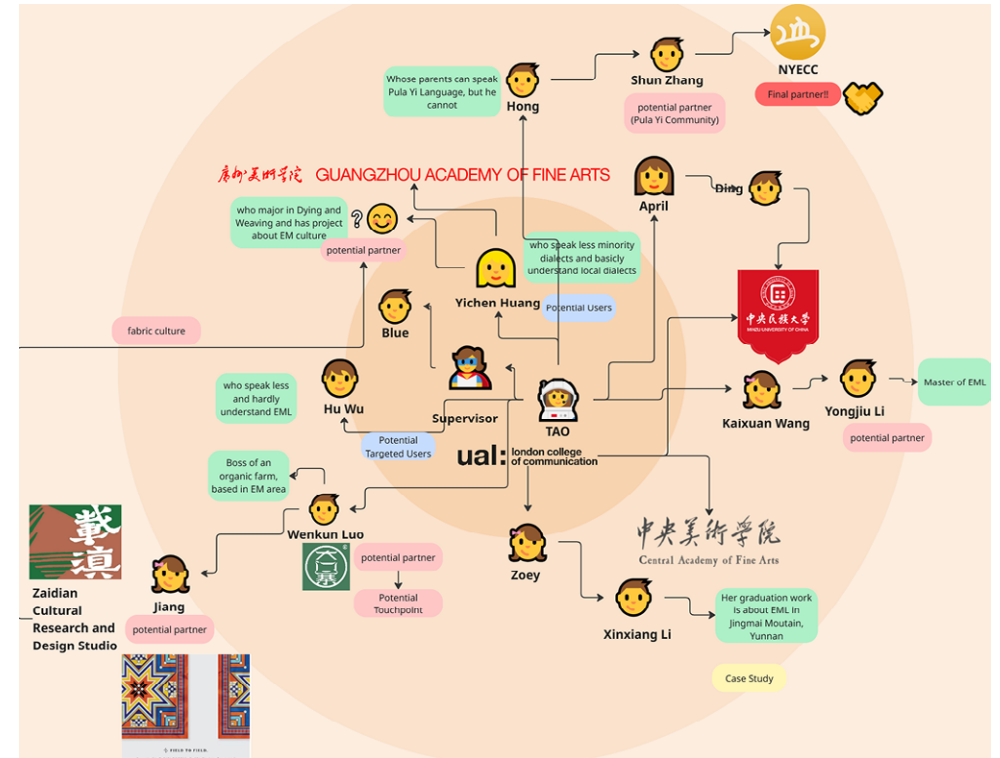
Screenshot of a conversation with a friend who enjoys songs in Chinese ethnic minority languages.

# Adapting Research Networking Tools to the Chinese Context

## Research Networking Tools:

WeChat communication  
Friends' support  
Networking connections

In China, the process of finding research collaborators differs greatly from international contexts. While institutions overseas typically rely on official websites and email communication, many Chinese organisations still prefer phone calls—an approach that was impractical for me while based in the UK during June and July. As a result, WeChat became the primary channel for contacting potential partners.

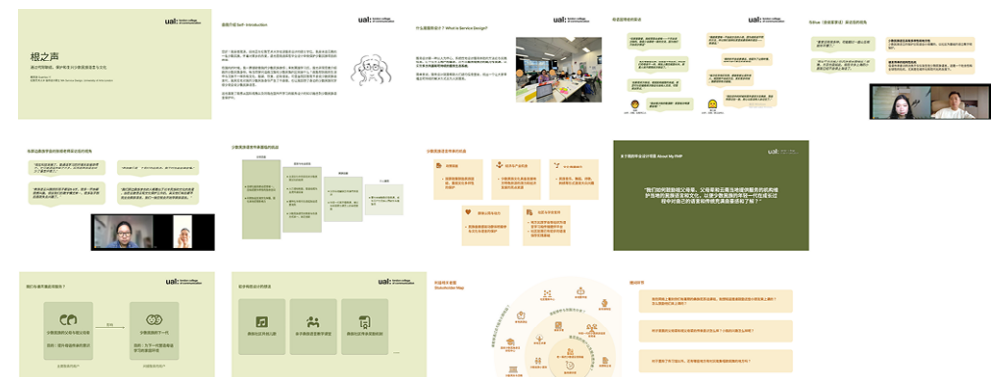


Networking Mapping

## Reflection:

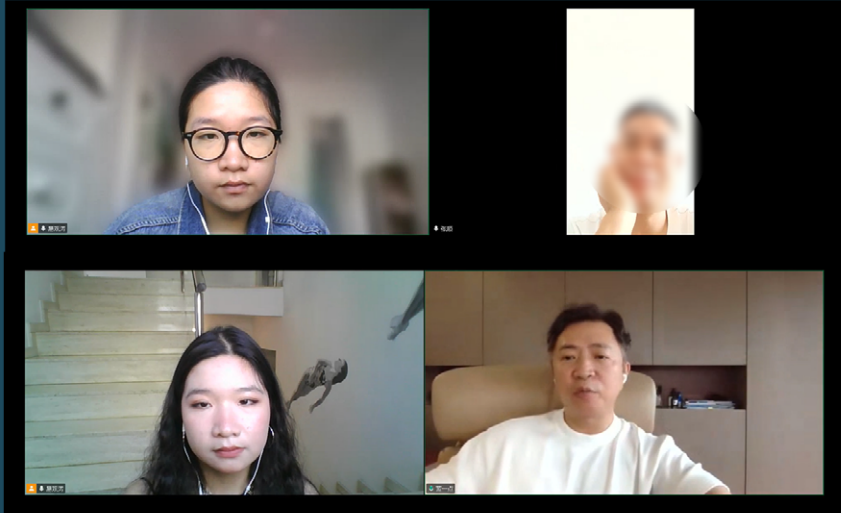
By reaching out to friends and former classmates—particularly those with experience working in ethnic minority communities or speaking non-Mandarin mother tongues—I was able to identify experts and organisations involved in minority language preservation in Yunnan. Their introductions also provided diverse perspectives from different linguistic regions across China.

This networking process helped me establish a project-specific research network and offered an early understanding of the broader landscape of minority language and dialect use in China.



The screenshot of the remote presentation

## Interviews with Individuals from Different Regions of China



Screenshots of meeting with Blue and Shun Zhang

The process of finding potential collaborators also created opportunities to interview friends and contacts whose mother tongues differ from Mandarin. At this stage, the goal was to listen to diverse voices and understand each participant's perception of their own language — like a climber using a telescope to find the right direction before setting off.

### Challenges:

***"I spoke a little Sha Zhuang when I was a kid, but in primary school I thought it sounded too different, so I stopped learning it."***

***"At family dinners, everyone speaks Sha — except me. I can't communicate well with my grandma."***

-- Hu Wu, 25, from the Sha Zhuang community

### Key Insights:

- Mainstream culture remains dominant, leading to a loss of confidence among ethnic minority language speakers.
- Communication barriers exist between younger and older generations who speak different languages.

***“At the market, people often think I’m not local because I don’t speak the dialect. It makes me feel embarrassed.”***

-- Yichen Huang, 22, from Taizhou, Zhejiang Province

***“We used to teach bilingually, but with technology making Mandarin easier to learn, the Yi language is gradually losing its space in daily life.”***

***“The kids in our Yi language interest classes gradually lose interests due to teaching tools are limited.”***

-- Shun Zhang, from the Pula Yi community, a principal of the primary school in Pingbian city

***“There are many kinds of Hakka dialects — you might not understand each other just across a mountain.”***

***“It’s not a unique issue. For instance — many kids in Shanghai don’t speak their dialect at all now.”***

Blue, from the Hakka community (a Han sub-group)

## Key Insights:

- Language loss leads to emotional distance and a weakened sense of belonging to one’s hometown culture.

## Key Insights:

- Modernization and technology have accelerated the spread of Mandarin while marginalizing minority languages.
- The limited tools hinder long-term engagement and motivation among young learners.

## Key Insights:

- In China, the linguistic diversity and locality make preservation best approached at a regional or community-based level.
- Both ethnic minority languages and local dialects face crises of transmission

## Opportunities:

***"I can't speak Sha Zhuang, but I can sing the songs when we drink!"***

-- Hu Wu

***"I started writing down the traditional dialect idioms my grandmother shared. I knew if I didn't, no one would remember them."***

-- Yichen Huang

***"Everyone in the Yi Association of Pingbian volunteers out of love for our culture. Some of us didn't grow up speaking the Yi language, but we use our spare time to learn it."***

-- Shun Zhang

## Key Insights:

- Language and culture are inseparable — art, songs, and literature serve as powerful media for transmitting and sustaining linguistic heritage.

## Key Insights:

- Existing community organizations are already supporting the revitalization of the Yi language by providing platforms for learning and engagement.
- A strong sense of cultural pride drives communities to take initiative in preserving their own language and heritage.

# Desk Research: Global State of Endangered Languages

## Aims:

Across the world, linguistic diversity is shrinking at an unprecedented pace. Globalization, urbanization, and dominant-language education have accelerated the decline of many minority languages.

Understanding the global situation helps contextualize the urgency of revitalizing Nisu Yi and other languages in China.

## What?

According to data from the UNESCO Atlas of Languages in Danger, disappearing languages are a serious global concern, with no less than 40% of the approximately 6,700 languages spoken today at risk of extinction (2016).

The map (see Figure. 02) further illustrates the distribution and ranking of endangered languages across different regions of the world.

## Why it supports this project?

This global landscape reinforces that language endangerment is not an isolated issue, but part of a worldwide crisis. It satuates the revitalization of Nisu Yi language in Yunnan within a broader movement toward protecting cultural identity, local knowledge, and community resilience.

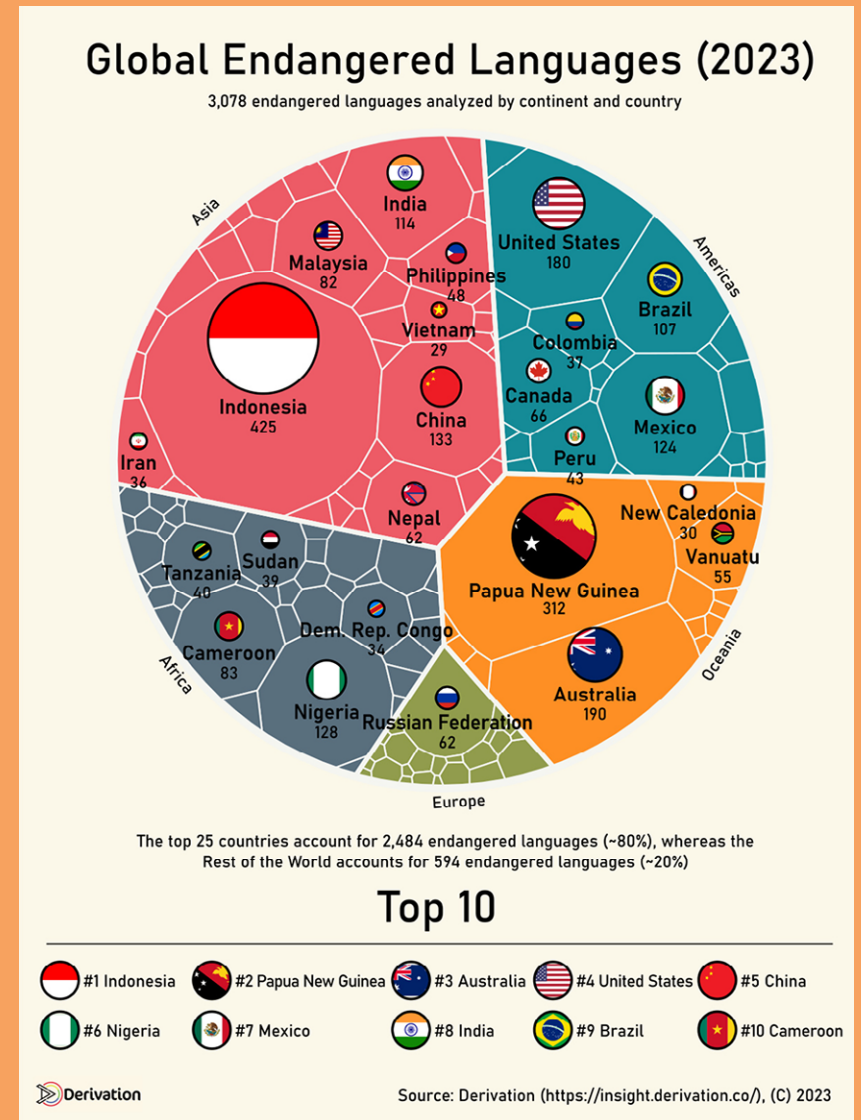


Figure 02. Endangered Language Map from <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cp/all-the-worlds-endangered-languages-by-country/>

# Case Study 01: Peer learning

## Project Name: Rainforest Succession – La Mianm Mianm Designers: Siyang Jing / Erlu Ni / Xinxiang Li

Rainforest Succession – La Mianm is a long-term project promoting ecological and economic sustainability while preserving Blang (Bulang) tea culture and traditional ingredients from Jingmai Mountain, a World Intangible Cultural Heritage site.

To address the lack of a written Blang language, the designers phonetically transcribed ingredient names using the alphabet, enabling participants to engage with Blang culture and language through food and participatory design.

## What I Learned?

*I learned to apply systems thinking by examining the project’s ecological, cultural, and social impact within the local context. Local ingredients and cooking methods were prioritised to minimise disruption, while Blang tea was introduced into urban bakeries to connect rural and city economies. This case shows how cultural preservation can emerge through systemic design that benefits the wider region.*

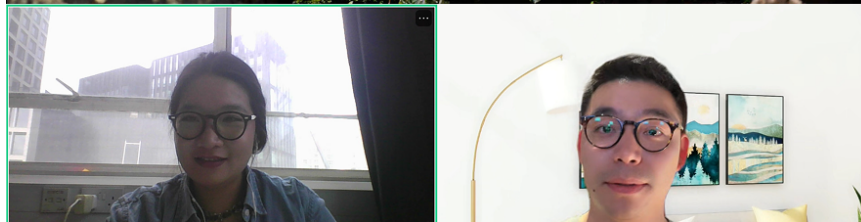
*Using familiar materials and methods also makes co-creation more accessible and strengthens relationships between designers and communities.*



## What I Unlearned?

*After introducing the project, I became curious about the stories behind it and prepared semi-structured interview questions to understand how designers communicate and engage with locals. Xinxiang shared that he sometimes adopted different roles—such as journalist, government officer, or student—to interact with locals and collect information.*

*This strategy, however, raised ethical concerns. For instance, when posing as a “journalist,” a villager once voiced hopes for real change. If we cannot truly address such issues, we must stay transparent about our roles to avoid false expectations. Statements like “I’m here to amplify your development” or “I’m learning from you” can help maintain honesty and trust.*



Screenshot of online meeting with Xinxiang Li

# Case Study 02: Embodied Co-design

## Project Name: Transition Living Lab 25': Co-creating Sanctuary

Transition Living Lab 2024–2025 is an international education program that integrates teaching and learning. It provides early-career researchers and community changemakers with the framework of “Utopia as a Method” to explore the concept of Sanctuary and to drive transitional social actions through co-creation (is IT ethical?, 2025).

<https://isitethical.co.uk/transition-living-lab-25-what-does-sanctuary-means/>



Photos with early-career researchers in TLL exhibition

## Reflection:

**Service designers are more than designers — they are also researchers and facilitators.**

*During the co-design process in the TLL, I realised that design is not only about asking questions but also about inspiring curiosity and imagination.*

*By using open questions, clear frameworks, encouraging language, and positive gestures, we created an inclusive atmosphere where participants could express their ideas freely.*

## The language of participation: designing for equality and empathy

*This practice helped me understand that language itself is a form of design. This was reflected in my decision to avoid English during community interactions and in my word choices.*

*When a participant once asked what “mother tongue” meant, I realised the term did not resonate locally. I began using phrases like “our Yi language,” “Nisu language,” or “Lolo language.” (as some Nisu Yi people refer to themselves as Lolo).*

*This shift deepened my understanding that respectful and culturally sensitive communication is the foundation of design.*

# Case Study 03: International Case Studies

Through desk research and first-hand participation in the Voiced: Endangered Language Festival in London, the researcher explored various global approaches to language revitalisation. These cases revealed diverse strategies for language protection and illustrated how languages can reconnect with the public through creative and participatory practices.

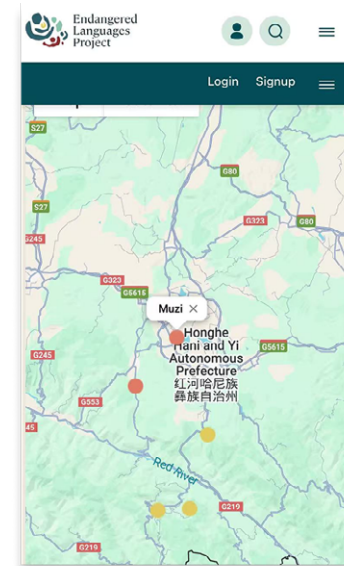
## Digital Approaches:

Many international initiatives support endangered languages through open archives and shared resources. Wikitongues, for instance, collects audiovisual recordings from speakers worldwide and provides a Revitalization Toolkit outlining common challenges and practical strategies. The Endangered Languages Project (ELP) similarly shares global preservation stories and offers a world map of endangered languages with extensive revitalisation materials.

While exploring the ELP map, the researcher found a language point labelled "Muzi," which NYECC suggested may correspond to Nisu Yi. Locals refer to the west of Mengzi as "Mu zi bbep mop," a phrase that evolved through oral transmission into the place name "Mengzi." This discrepancy highlighted the gap between digital records and local knowledge, underscoring the need for place-based verification in future documentation.



Toolkit from Wikitongues  
<https://wikitongues.org/>



Muzi on ELP's digital global map  
<https://www.endangeredlanguages.com/>

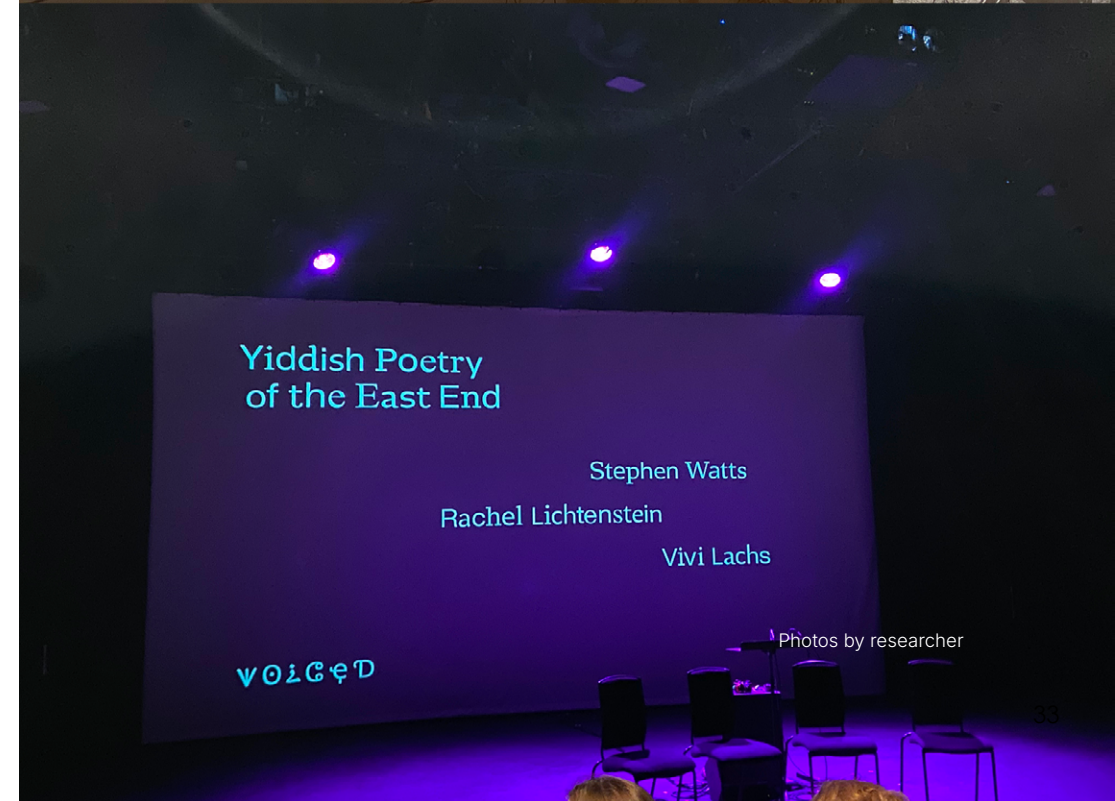


Nothern Yi characters on Voiced exhibition

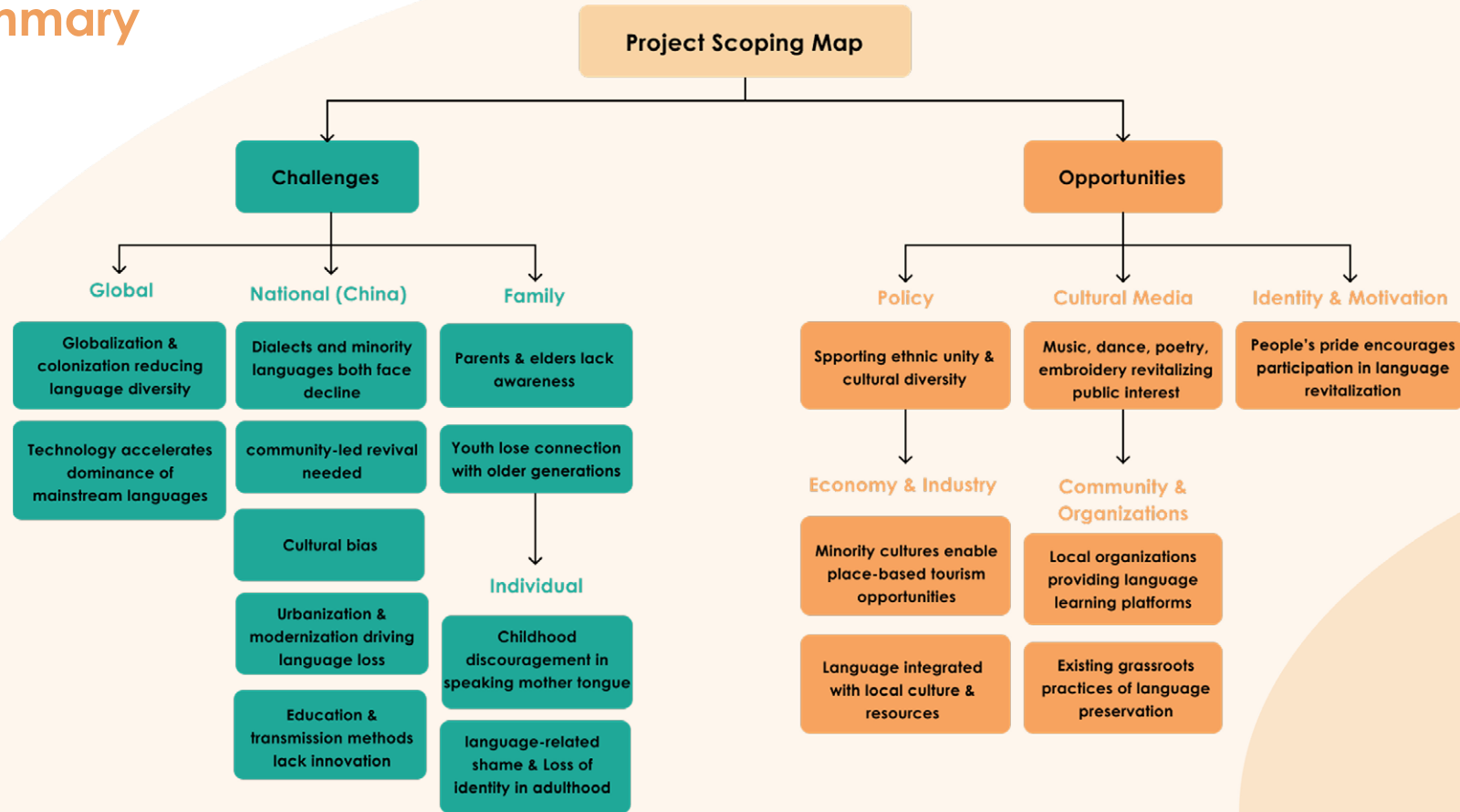
# Cultural and Public Engagement Approaches

*The Voiced* festival illustrated how art and public events can raise awareness of language loss. Mapping installations visualised global endangered languages, while storytelling sessions—such as accounts of poet Stencl's efforts to revive Yiddish in East London—showed how language connects to identity and collective memory.

These international cases revealed that language revitalisation is not only about documentation; it is also about fostering emotional and cultural connections through art, stories, and community participation.



# Summary



Place-based Discovery in Nisu Yi Community, Yunnan, China

## Reflection:

The initial research activities helped me build a broad, multi-layered understanding of the topic of endangered languages. The fact that many minority languages are disappearing is the result of multiple factors. Therefore, when moving into the following field research, I realized I should continue to explore the challenges faced by the Nisu Yi community from a more systemic perspective.

The case studies also made me reflect on my future research methods and potential deliveries. For example, I started to consider the inclusivity of language, how to build trust among local villagers, and whether the outcomes could connect rural and urban areas by using local culture as a means of language revitalization.

Therefore, my next step will be to go deeper into Yongning and Renhou villages to explore the real situation of the Nisu Yi community.

**02**

# ***PLACE-BASED DISCOVER***

# Introduction of Partnership: Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre (NYECC)

The collaboration for this project was established with the Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre (NYECC) — a community-led volunteer organization founded in 2018 by two local cultural advocates, Pu and Li, in Renhou Village, Mengzi City.

## Why collaborate with NYECC?

Before partnering with NYECC, the researcher had also reached out to the Yi Cultural Society in Pingbian County. Although that organization actively promotes Yi culture in urban contexts, most of its members belong to different Yi subgroups (such as the Pula branch). Moreover, due to the city's multi-ethnic composition, the group lacked a stable, cohesive community base.

Considering the limited research timeframe and the need to build trust with participants, the researcher ultimately decided to collaborate with NYECC — a locally rooted organization that focuses specifically on the Nisu Yi subgroup.

## Strengths:

- They have a permanent activity space within a Nisu Yi settlement, enabling close engagement with the community.
- They run a weekly “Yi Songs Workshop,” where the researcher can participate and build trust.
- With over seven years of operation, they have extensive experience in community engagement and a deep understanding of local customs and traditions.
- As a small cultural museum, NYECC holds a rich collection of Yi-related historical, cultural, and linguistic materials that informed the design research.



The entrance of NYECC

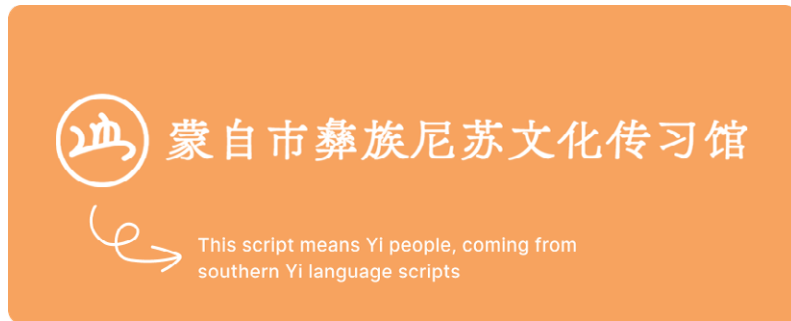


Traditional farming tools



Collections in NYECC  
Photos by researcher

# Understanding NYECC



Logo of NYECC, designed by researcherh

## Who are they serving?

They mainly serve for Nisu Yi community in Renhou and Yongning Village, sometimes for other Yi Community and primary school students around Mengzi City.

## What activities?

As shown in Figure 03, NYECC promotes language revitalisation mainly through Nisu Yi language training courses and the “Weekly Yi Songs” workshops.

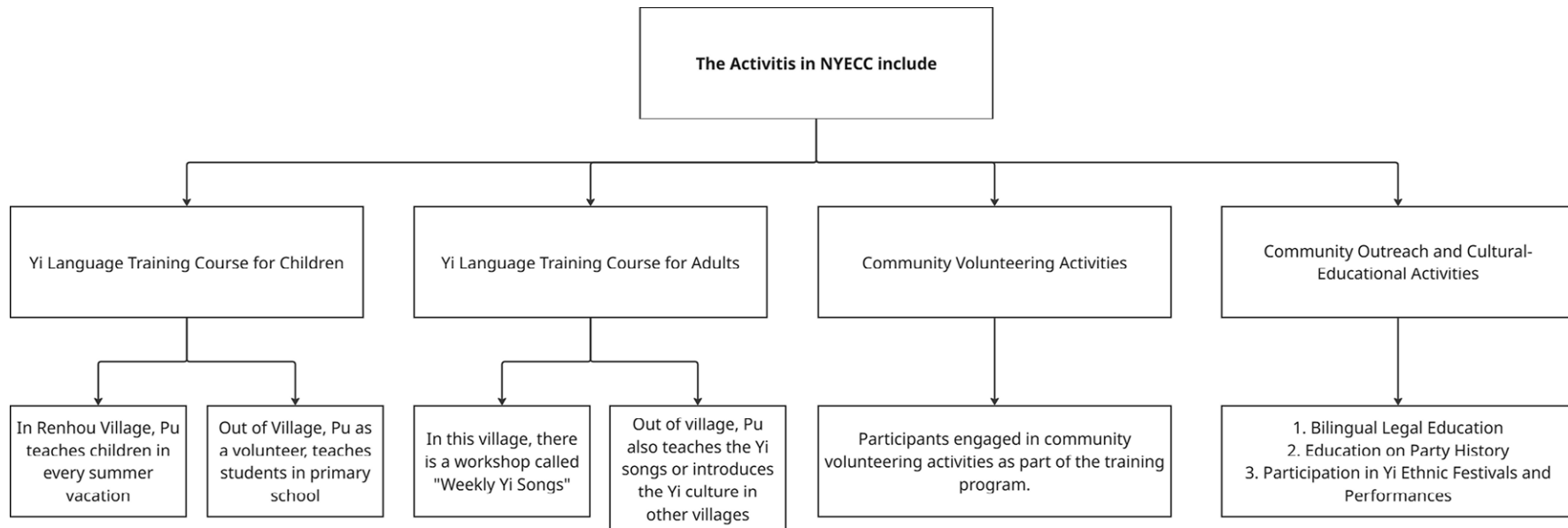


Figure 03. The Activities Structure of NYECC

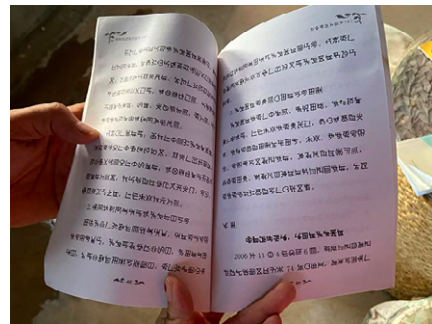
# Challenges in NYECC

## Resources exist, but they are not accessible

NYECC holds a wide range of materials on Yi language and culture—including bilingual Yi–Chinese textbooks, Yi-only learning materials, legends, stories, and historical documents. Although the collection on the Nisu Yi branch is extensive, most villagers cannot read Yi script and have limited literacy, making much of this content difficult to use. Even *A Comparative Vocabulary of Nisu Yi and Chinese*, compiled by Pu, remains text-heavy and inaccessible for many community members.



Bilingual textbooks in Mandarin and Yi



Yi-only textbook

## Revitalization should start locally, not top-down

Pu shared that he once contributed to a project aimed at creating a unified written form of Yi by combining characters used across Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou.

However, the effort failed. Each Yi community has spoken its own variety for generations, and these linguistic differences form an essential part of their cultural identity. As a result, residents found it difficult to accept a standardized Yi language imposed from above.

## Language Recording without Access

**“An organization once asked me to do recordings, but after I finished, they just stored them in the Yunnan Language Archive — and that was it. No follow-up at all.”**

-- Pu

# Co-discover Session with Participants in NYECC

Before visiting NYECC in person, the researcher had already learned a great deal about the partner organisation but knew little about the individuals who regularly attended the “Weekly Yi Songs” Workshop. During the first visit, beyond observing their participation, the goal was to understand what motivated them to come together each week to sing. Based on these initial questions, a short co-discover session was conducted.

## Why:

The session aimed to explore participants' motivation for the workshop. In addition, since NYECC has long-established trust with the local community, the session provided an opportunity for the researcher to build initial rapport and clarify the project's research purpose in a familiar and trusted environment.

## Method:

Considering that the centre's space is arranged in a classroom layout and that many participants are farmers with limited literacy, the co-design partner suggested avoiding written exercises. Therefore, a verbal Q&A format was used: the researcher displayed the questions, participants responded orally, and the researcher recorded their answers.

## Time:

Approximately 8–10 minutes.

## Participants Number:

Around 40

## Tool:

Two A3 sheets , each with a question written in marker:  
Why did you come here to join the “Weekly Yi Songs” Workshop?  
What does speaking Nisu Yi mean to you?



Researcher was explaining the reason why she wanted to ask these two questions for them

# Insights from Co-discover Session

Figure 04 shows participants' responses.

## For Participants:

- Most participants showed a strong sense of linguistic inheritance and pride in their identity.
- They came to the NYECC to learn more about the Yi language and culture.
- NYECC also provides them with a place for leisure and social interaction within the village.

***"I wasn't very fluent before, but after learning a lot at the Culture Centre, I can now speak Yi fluently."***

-- One Participant

## For NYECC:

- The centre's primary goal is to teach the Yi language and strengthen cultural awareness within the community.
- Strengthening confidence in speaking their mother tongue. Through various activities and encouraging language, participants are motivated to speak Yi openly and proudly
- NYECC offers performance opportunities that allow villagers to showcase their linguistic and cultural heritage, making their community more visible to the wider public.

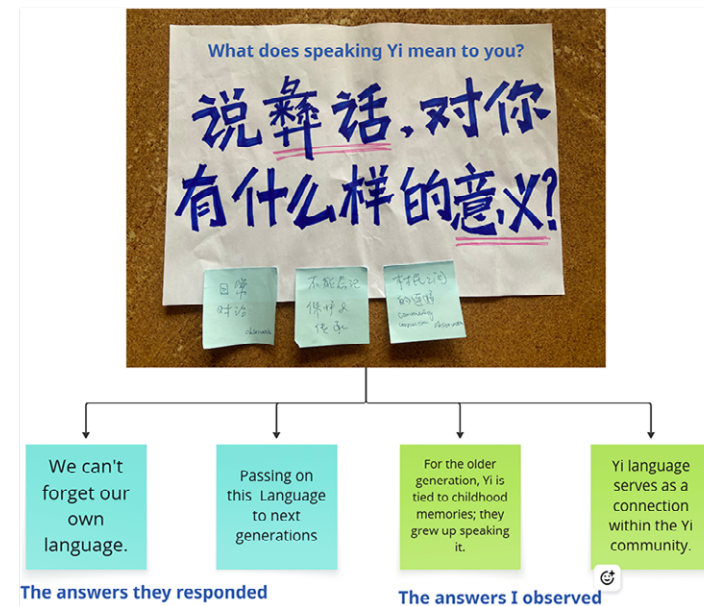


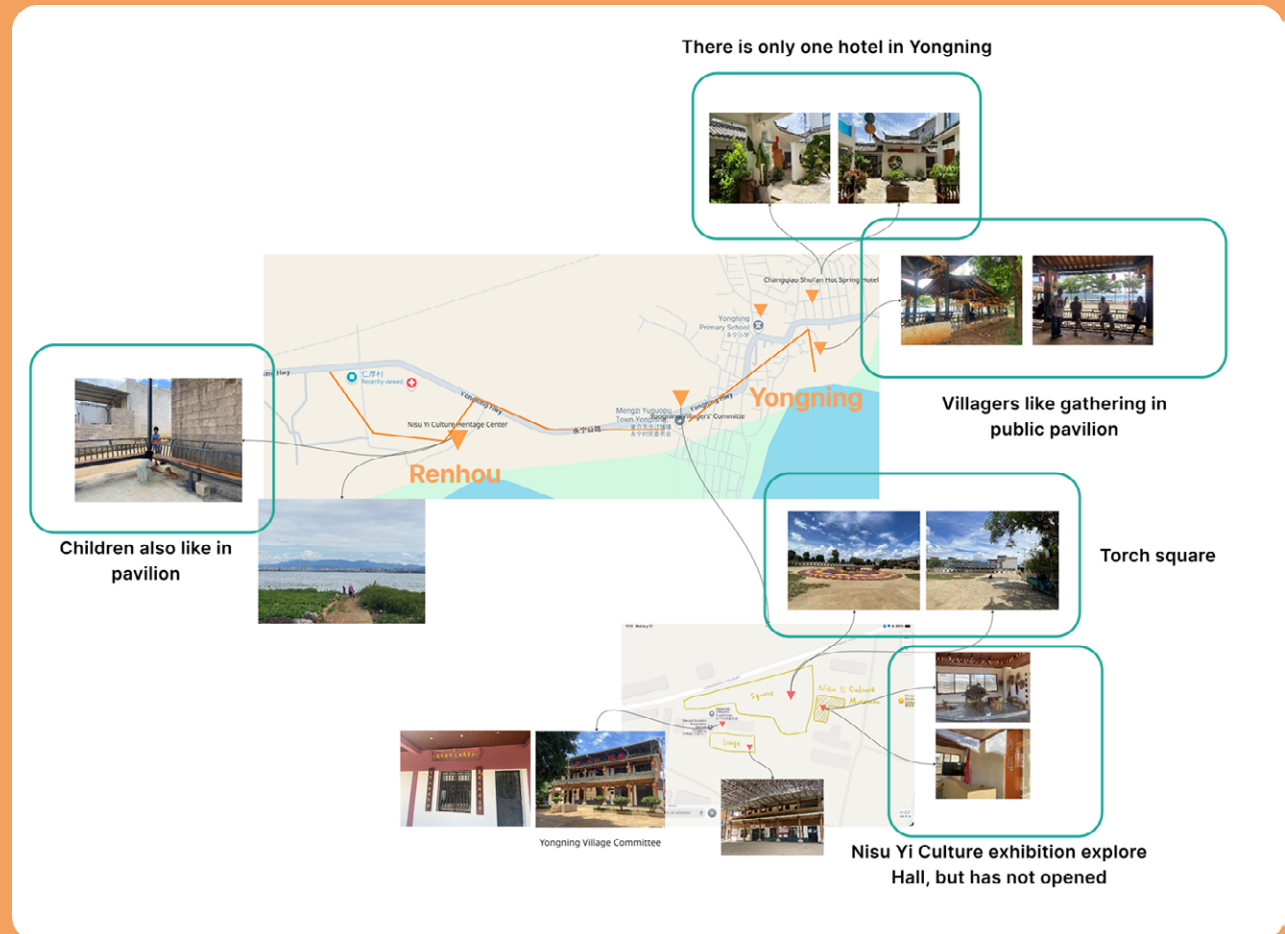
Figure 04. All responses and observation from researcher

# Field Trip & Interviews

## Aims:

- To understand the places and spaces within the village — for example, which areas are where people often gather, and where I could conduct interviews with villagers. Which locations are connected to local culture?
- To interview villagers beyond the NYECC participants in order to explore a broader range of perspectives on the Nisu Yi language.
- To understand the general level of language proficiency within the village.
- Through observation, to initially explore people's attitudes toward mother-tongue transmission.
- To identify other local organizations or government institutions that could potentially support language revitalization.

Interviews with  
more than **20** people



Mapping of Field Trip

# Interviews with Nisu Yi Community

## Interview Tool:

### Introduction:

Start by introducing Clarifying that their insights will help understand local perspectives on language use and cultural transmission.

### Question Framework:

1. Can you speak Nisu Yi? How old are you?
2. If you have children, do they speak Nisu Yi? How old are they?
3. Are there any regular activities in the village related to language or culture?

Adjust the questions depending on the interviewee's background and role in the village — for example, elders, parents, or youth.



Photo with Interviewees

***"I often sing Nisu Yi songs with my friends in front of my house!"***

— Grandma in Yongning

***"I used to speak a few phrases in Yi, but not anymore... I mix dialect and Yi when I talk."***

— Male, 50–60, retired teacher

***"It's already been lost in my generation, my children can't speak as well."***

— Female, around 40

## Key Insights:

### Intergenerational Decline with Differentiation

- Elders (80+): Mostly fluent native speakers. However, intergenerational language transmission is decreasing.
- Middle-aged adults (40–60): Tend to understand but struggle to express fluently. Some mix Yi with Mandarin; others rarely speak it.
- Children and teenagers: Nisu Yi Language ability varies widely. Some learn naturally from peers, others through intentional teaching by grandparents, while some barely use the mother tongue at all.

***"I will definitely pass Yi on to my grandson. It's our culture."***

— Villager in Yongning

***"My grandmother taught me. I'd point to things and ask how to say them, and she would tell me."***

— Girl, age 6

## Observation:

One elderly woman spoke Yi but switched to the Mengzi dialect when talking to children.

## Key Insights:

### Language Transmission Relies on Attitude

- Elders with strong cultural pride would actively teach the language to younger generations.
- Without conscious effort, even fluent Nisu Yi speakers may default to sinicized dialects when speaking with children.
- Some children show self-driven learning — asking elders how to say things and forming organic "learning chains."

***"We have Yi dance and singing activities in our village, and we always take the children to join."***

— Staff, Yongning Village Committee

***"I can't speak Yi, but my son can. He learned it naturally from his friends while playing in the village."***

— Villager from Yongning

## Key Insights:

### Public and Festive Spaces as Natural Language Classrooms

Playgame, peer interactions, or cultural events such as the Torch Festival naturally encourage mother-tongue communication and informal learning.

***"Tourism and cultural events have become more frequent. However, most activities remain concentrated in festival celebrations."***

— Staff, Yongning Village Committee

***"Tourists are few, except during the Yi Torch festival."***

— Business owner, Changqiao Shui'an Hot Spring Hotel

## Key Insights:

### Cultural and Tourism Activities Help but Have Limited Impact

Yongning and Renhou villages preserve many traditional cultural events in festivals, which provide valuable spaces for language use. However, tourism-related events often lack sustainability. The use of the mother tongue tends to appear in short-term, celebratory contexts rather than sustained community practices.

# Reflection of Field Research and Interviews in Yongning & Renhou

## **Why didn't I ask about language loss at the beginning?**

*As a service designer working closely with communities, the most important thing is to build trust. Imagine meeting someone for the first time, and they immediately start talking to you about complex social issues — it would feel overwhelming and distant.*

*Pu told me Yongning and Renhou were once very poor villages, but with modernization in the early 2000s, many people learned to speak the Mengzi dialect and Mandarin, which significantly improved their quality of life. In this context, asking or commenting on the disappearance of their language without any trust being built would, in my opinion, be unethical.*

*Therefore, in my research activities, I avoided asking direct questions like "Why is your language disappearing?" Instead, I used a gentler and more conversational approach — for instance, sharing my own stories to invite their responses, or following their own reflections on language loss when they brought it up naturally in conversation.*

*This experience reminded me that sensitive social topics — such as language endangerment — require empathy, timing, and contextual understanding. Building genuine relationships before seeking answers not only leads to more meaningful insights but also aligns with the ethical responsibilities of service design research.*



There is a lake near Yongning & Renhou Village, called Changqiao sea. People hadn't seen the real sea on the mainland, so when they saw the massive lake, they would call it "sea".

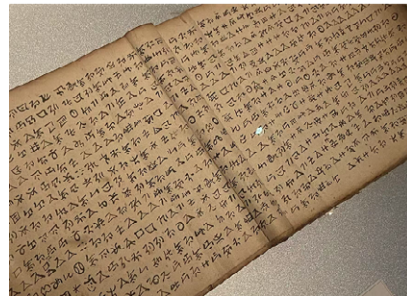
## Field Research in Urban Area

### Visiting Honghe Prefectural Museum

To further understand how Nisu Yi language and culture are represented in local cultural and tourism contexts, the Honghe Prefectural Museum was selected as a key research site.



Video display of Yi embroidery



Yi-language Religious scriptures

***“We welcome different organizations or artists to hold exhibitions here, and we can also offer a platform for promotion.”***

— One museum staff

### Key Insights:

- The exhibitions on ethnic culture and language are presented in a general way, with no specific reference to local language preservation.
- The museum receives a high number of visitors, suggesting its potential as an urban touchpoint — a public platform to raise visibility and awareness of Nisu Yi language revitalization efforts.

### Interviewing with Staff from Guanlan Subdistrict Community Service Center

Yongning and Renhou villages are mainly administered by Guanlan, which primarily promotes tourism and cultural activities through their official WeChat accounts and video channels.

***“We currently don’t have any offline publicity touchpoints, but we hope to have some in the future.”***

— One staff in Guanlan



Logo of Guanlan



The first person on the left in the photo is the staff member from Guanlan

### Key Insights:

- Their publicity network could help share NYECC’s activities, workshops, and Nisu Yi language revitalization stories with a broader audience
- Adding offline touchpoints could further engage urban residents and increase public awareness of local culture.

# Research with Local Residents in Urban Area

## Aim:

The aim of this research was to gain an overview of how urban residents value their cultural heritage and how they perceive cultural preservation and promotion.

These insights help inform the design of a language revitalization service system that connects both rural and urban actors. Language preservation is not solely the responsibility of rural communities — it requires collaboration between cities and villages to encourage broader public participation in protecting and celebrating local languages.

## Number of Participants:

17 residents. Due to the relatively small sample size, the findings are presented primarily in numerical form.

## Methods:

An online questionnaire was distributed through WeChat Moments, allowing participants to respond anonymously by scanning a QR code.

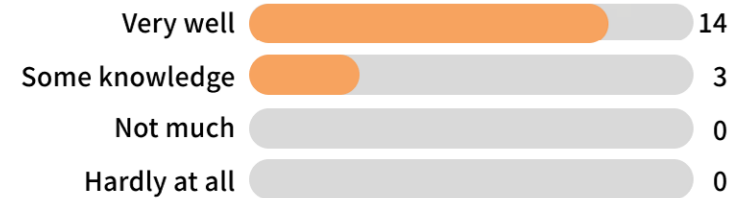


Screenshot of Researcher's Wechat Moments



Materials of Survey

How much do you know about Monzi's history and ethnic cultures?



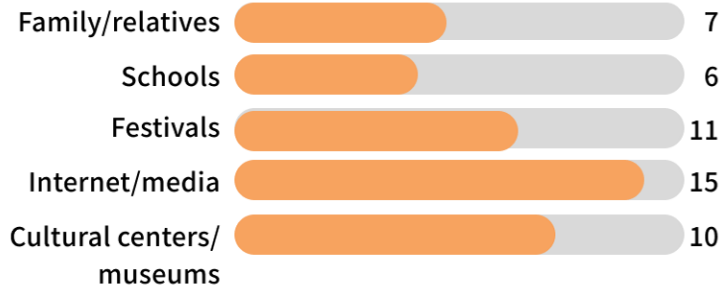
Do you think it is important to protect local ethnic languages and culture?



## Key Insights:

**Cultural and Tourism Activities Help but Have Limited Impact.** Most participants believe that preserving local ethnic culture and language is "very important." However, many residents in Mengzi have only a moderate understanding of local history and ethnic culture and some have little to no awareness at all.

How do you usually learn about local ethnic culture?  
(multiple choice)



### Key Insights:

#### Existing touchpoints.

Local residents primarily engage with ethnic culture through online media, festivals, and museums etc.

Do you think ethnic culture is well represented in  
Mengzi's tourism?

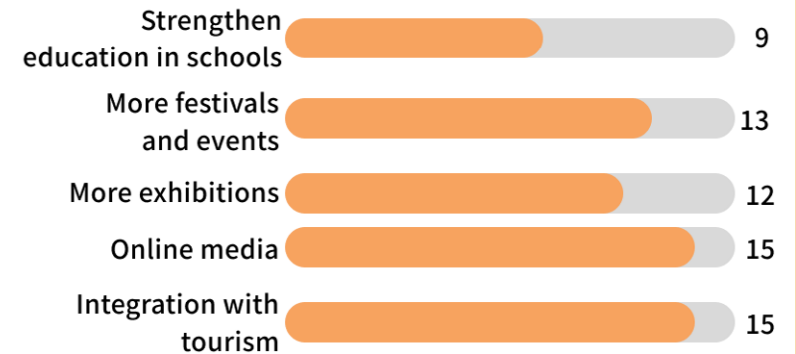


### Key Insights:

#### Perception of cultural presentation in tourism.

Many residents felt that the representation of local culture within Mengzi's tourism industry remains underdeveloped, suggesting room for deeper and more authentic storytelling.

How would you like to see local ethnic culture better  
preserved and promoted? (multiple choice)



### Key Insights:

#### Suggested strategies for cultural transmission.

Many residents felt that the representation of local culture within Mengzi's tourism industry remains underdeveloped, suggesting room for deeper and more authentic storytelling.

### Reflection:

*This research in the urban area helped me understand the available cultural resources and how local residents perceive and engage with their culture and language heritage. The findings reveal that while the city has abundant resources, it lacks localized cultural narratives. Most participants recognize the importance of cultural preservation, yet their actual involvement remains limited.*

*These insights inform the next design focus — to build a service system that connects urban and rural contexts, enabling language revitalization to become a collaborative and sustainable social effort rather than initiatives confined to rural communities.*

**03**  
***DEFINE***

# Place-based Challenges & Opportunities Map

## Challenges

## Opportunities

### 1. Local Community / NYECC

- Resources exist but are inaccessible to most villagers.
- Language transmission relies on individual attitudes rather than systematic support.
- Intergenerational decline.
- Recordings are made but not shared due to lack of access platforms.

- Strong sense of cultural pride and identity among participants in NYECC.
- NYECC serves as a trusted social and cultural hub.
- Sparking children's interests and curiosity to learn Nisu Yi.

### 2. Public Spaces & Cultural / Tourism Activities

- Language use appears mainly during festivals or celebrations, lacking sustained practice.

- Public and festive spaces naturally function as language classrooms (play, peer interaction, festivals).
- Torch Festival and local events provide authentic contexts for Yi-language communication.
- Cultural heritage offers potential for embedded language-learning touchpoints.

### 3. Urban Area

- Urban residents have limited understanding of local ethnic culture and language.
- Cultural storytelling in tourism is surface-level and lacks depth.

- Urban touchpoints can connect NYECC with broader audiences beyond the village.
- The Survey shows strong public willingness to preserve culture, providing leverage for narrative-building.
- Offline touchpoints can engage urban residents and bring culture into everyday life.

## Persona 01



### Lei Pu

48 year-old  
Culture Facilitator

***"I feel heartbroken seeing our mother tongue fading away..."***

***"We also need to learn how other communities are revitalising their Indigenous languages."***

### Background:

Pu grew up in a Yi village where everyone spoke Nisu Yi. After finishing his studies, he returned to work locally. Over the years, he has witnessed a gradual loss of the Yi language among younger generations. To respond, he joined a local Yi cultural organisation, hoping to make a difference through community activities and language promotion.

### Challenges:

- Feels that current programmes and digital resource are not made for them.
- Participation among young people is low — most revitalisation activities are still led by older generations.
- Community organisers lack access to practical design tools and facilitation methods.
- Language preservation has limited social visibility, and many community members are unaware of its broader cultural value.

### Goals:

- Rebuild community confidence in the local language and raise awareness of cultural value.
- Promote diverse and engaging revitalisation activities that attract more people.
- Create public platforms to showcase Nisu Yi culture.
- Establish a sustainable community-led system so that language preservation does not rely on individuals alone.

### Needs:

- Accessible toolkits to help organise community events more effectively.
- Supportive networks involving schools, government bodies, and NGOs to strengthen collaboration.
- Creative and inclusive engagement methods that encourage participation across age groups.
- Stronger communication channels to increase public visibility and social recognition of language preservation.

## Persona 02



### Jiuying Li

67 year-old

Knowledge Holder

***"We're getting old, and no one understands our songs anymore..."***

***"People in our village are almost forgetting our own language."***

### Background:

Jiuying has lived in Renhou Village her entire life. She loves singing traditional Yi songs and often performs at local gatherings or festivals. Her grandparents taught her the old songs and stories in Nisu Yi, and she used to speak Yi with everyone in the village.

Now, however, her grandchildren mostly speak Mandarin or Mengzi dialect, and she finds it hard to communicate with them in her mother tongue.

### Challenges:

- Gradually losing confidence in her community's language and culture.
- The younger generation no longer speaks Nisu Yi, leading to a break in intergenerational language transmission.
- Lacks platforms to express her culture — she can sing and tell stories, but has few chances to share them.
- Limited education and digital literacy make it difficult to engage with new forms of communication.

### Goals:

- Hopes younger people can learn and appreciate Yi songs and language again.
- Wishes for elders' cultural knowledge to be seen and respected.
- Wants to continue participating in community cultural activities rather than being forgotten.
- Hopes for a more inclusive community where people of all ages can take part.

### Needs:

- Accessible platforms or simple tools for recording, sharing, and showcasing Yi songs and stories.
- Intergenerational exchange opportunities — activities or workshops that bring young people into dialogue with elders.
- External recognition and support from the community or outside organisations to validate her contributions.
- Guidance and companionship from designers or cultural practitioners to help transform her knowledge.

## Persona 03



**Lin**

32 year-old  
Identity Rebuilder

***"I want to pass my mother tongue on to my children, but I can no longer speak it."***

***"I want to pass my mother tongue on to my children, but I can no longer speak it."***

### Background:

Lin grew up in Yongning Village and later moved to the city for her studies and career. Although she can still understand Nisu Yi, she can no longer speak it.

She feels a deep sense of regret, seeing the language as a symbol of her community's culture that she is now unable to pass on. Passionate about Yi dance and music, she actively participates in community performances whenever possible.

### Challenges:

- Belongs to a "gap generation" — able to understand the language but unable to speak it fluently.
- Grew up and works in urban environments where there are few opportunities to use her mother tongue.
- Feels a sense of cultural loss and contradiction — identifying as Yi while being fully immersed in a different language environment
- Her children grow up in a same environment with little exposure to Yi language.
- Although she actively joins cultural activities, there are few structured learning resources or accessible language education channels.

### Goals:

- Hopes her children can learn and use Yi again, strengthening their cultural identity and pride.
- Wishes to stay emotionally connected to her hometown through music and cultural events.
- Hopes language learning can become fun, natural, and part of daily life rather than a formal task.
- Wants to relearn or practice Yi herself to regain a sense of cultural belonging.

### Needs:

- Family-friendly learning methods that allow parents and children to learn together.
- Opportunities for people of all ages, especially youth and children.
- Accessible learning materials such as simple lessons, songs, and everyday expressions.
- Systems that integrate language learning with cultural events — for example, during festivals, performances, or community workshops.
- Emotional spaces that help rebuild cultural identity through stories, music, or shared community experiences.

What challenges they face?

Education Gap  
Bilingual Teaching  
Needs more the young teachers or young teachers to continue

policy has supported, but less practice in real life.

What opportunity they have?

# HMW question

General language transmission

Language learning resource isn't

Different Branches have totally

Most of villagers can speak and listen their ML but can't write

Entertainment

Language in life

Yi Art songs performance

Signage

# How might we support locals and service providers to maintain their language and culture in Yongning & Renhou Village, Yunnan, China, so that they can strengthen their confidence to keep their mother language alive?

Family & Village  
grandparents do not have

Different family transmission

Mother language

If grandparents or parents have awareness of LT

Children's curiosity

Participants of Culture Centre have very strong awareness

less exposure. (only some who want to understand Yi culture would love to visit)

No offline touchpoints to let more people know

Here is popular only in Torch Festival. But less tourists as usual.

Urban Touchpoints  
Honghe Museum  
↓

traditional Culture Heritage - Yongning Flower Room

Chang Bin Lake, Beautiful Nancang Park

Nisun Yi culture Centre welcome everyone join in

## Reflection:

*When I returned to China, there was only about a week between finishing the field research and entering the define phase. During that time, I found myself hesitating a lot.*

*I wasn't sure whether my ideas would truly engage the villagers, and in hindsight, it was because I didn't yet understand them deeply enough. Without that confidence, I struggled to move forward, and I spent almost an entire week unable to generate a "perfect" idea.*

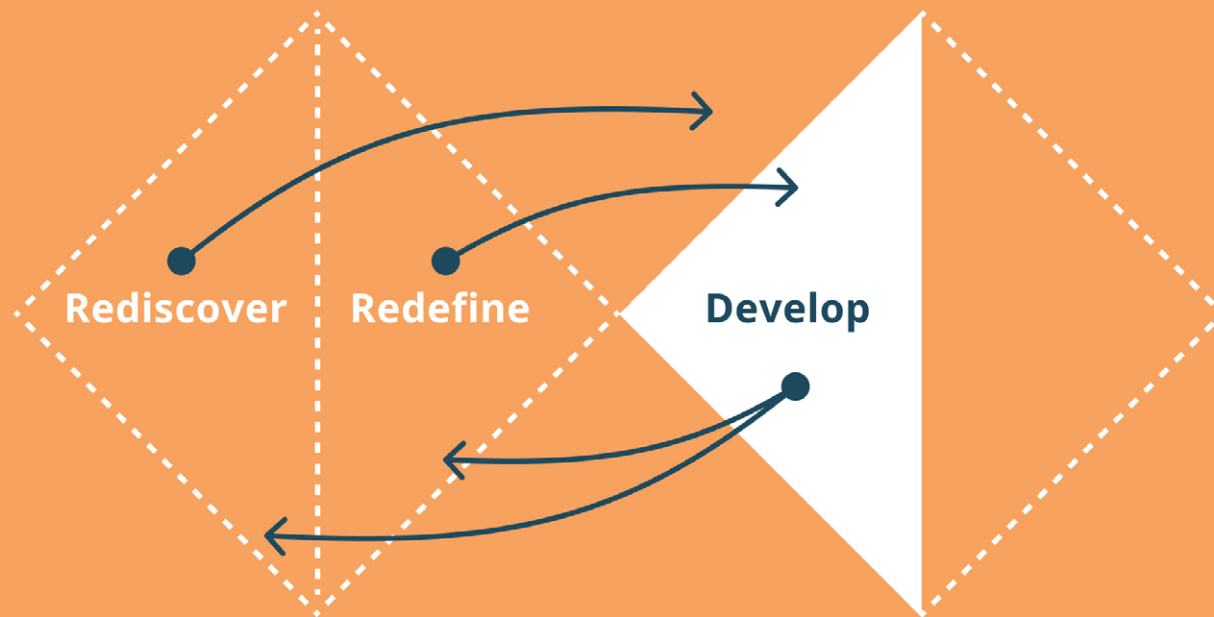
*So I made a quick but important decision: instead of waiting for the best idea, I would bring my "imperfect" and even "naive" ideas directly to the villagers. By interacting with them through prototypes, I learned not only what they thought, but also how they behaved — and this process itself became a key way of understanding the community through designing.*



## Learning Through Design

The prototyping in my Develop phase was not merely about validating my design ideas — it was a continuous process of learning how to make the Nisu Yi community feel comfortable and naturally engaged in the service.

Therefore, the Develop phase in my Double Diamond process was not linear but loopy — a cyclical journey of discovering, learning, and prototyping.



**04**  
**DEVELOP**

# Prototype 01: Certificates of Award

## Why?

In the Chinese context, certificates and awards carry strong symbolic meaning — they represent honor and recognition. For example, in the NYECC (see Figure 05), the tables are filled with various certificates, showcasing the community's efforts to preserve the Nisu Yi language and culture. Therefore, the researcher assumed that certificates might serve as a motivational tool to encourage community participation and strengthen confidence.

## what?

Based on the structure of the workshops held in the NYECC, the researcher designed different types of certificates, such as those categorized by age group.

Participants were informed that those who consistently attended the workshops throughout the year would receive a certificate at the end of the year. The aim was to motivate continued participation. The researcher then asked: "If you could get this certificate by attending regularly, how would you feel about it?"

## How did participants respond?

Most participants expressed that they liked this idea and would be more willing to join the workshops for them.

However, when asked open-ended questions such as "How do you feel?" or "Do you have any thoughts?", participants remained mostly silent, suggesting that open-ended questions may not be effective in this rural context.

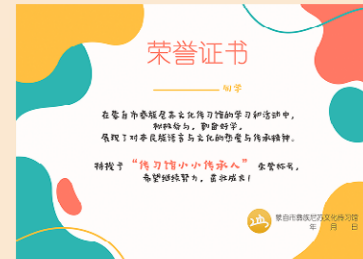


Figure 05. Certificates on the table in NYECC



Materials of Prototype 01

Researcher introduced the Certificates

# Reflection on Prototype 01

## What I unlearned?

*Based on participants' reactions, I realized some limitations in this prototype test.*

*Firstly, I did not clearly explain what kind of activities would allow participants to earn the certificate. Simply saying that "they could get it by attending activities consistently" was not enough to make it meaningful or engaging.*

*Moreover, during the test, my lack of a clear idea structure affected my confidence. When communicating with the villagers, I was rather passive and did not guide them effectively to think from different perspectives.*

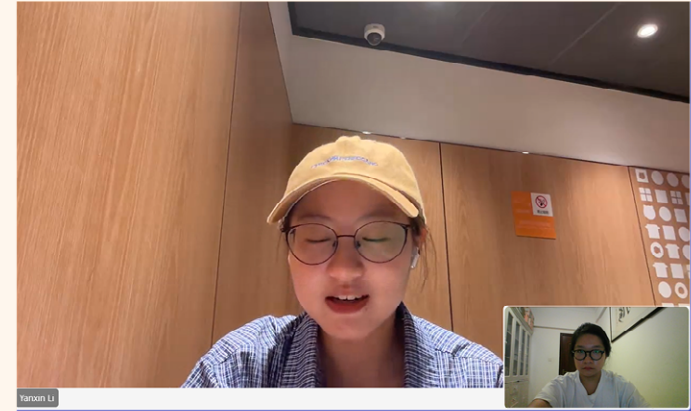
## What I learned?

*From participants' feedback, I found that open-ended questions are not effective in rural Chinese contexts. Researchers need to provide a "hook" to help participants quickly understand what the activity is about.*

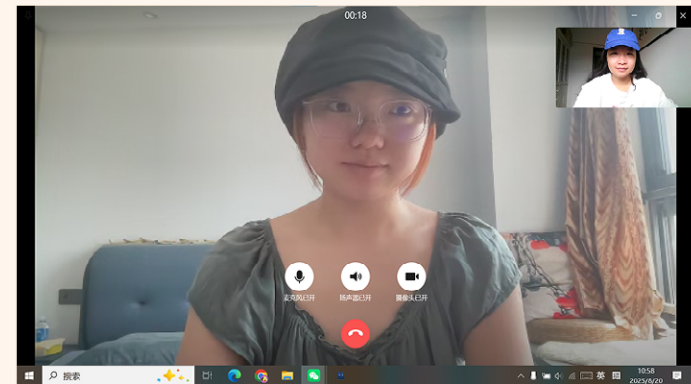
*To explore suitable prototyping approaches for rural contexts in China, I sought peer support from classmates who were conducting projects in the same country. I asked them what communication methods were less effective and which ones worked better.*

*We found a shared insight: only open questions without clear and tangible artefact often makes people unsure how to respond.*

*Therefore, in my later prototype sessions, I tested different design ideas, observed clues from users' reactions, and used tangible, easy-to-understand artefacts to engage participants more naturally in the activities.*



Peer Supporting with Yanxin Li (Yan)



Peer Supporting with Hao You (Amity)

Screen Shot Of Online Meeting With Peers

# Prototype 02: Hopscotch + Script Match Game

## Why?

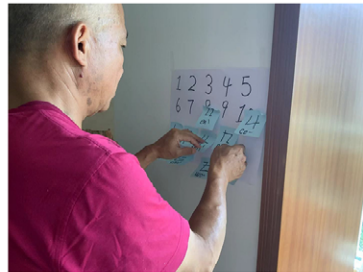
Explore whether a language-based game tool could support Nisu Yi language learning and encourage participation across generations.

## What?

- A hopscotch game combined with Yi number scripts and pronunciations.
- While playing, participants learn the pronunciation and writing of Yi numbers.
- Ends with a language matching game to reinforce memory.



Hopscotch



Nisu Yi Numbers Marching Game

## How did participants respond?

### Insight 01: There was still a language barrier

- Without someone who knew the Yi script, the game became difficult to carry out.
- To make the game dynamic, a “game facilitator” proficient in Nisu Yi was essential.

### Insight 02: Pronunciation challenge

***“I don’t know how to pronounce these numbers, how can I play?”***

Without Nisu Yi speakers present, participants could not pronounce words correctly.

### Insight 03: Older participants did not feel involved

***“My knees aren’t good, I can’t really jump, only walk.”***

They thought the game was more suitable for children — partly due to low interest, and partly because physical limitations made it difficult for them to join the hopscotch activity.

### Summary:

This prototype led to reflection on how future services might better include villagers of different age groups and reduce the burden of self-design, especially for those with less formal education.

# Prototype 03: Nisu Yi Language Keepers' Tips

## Inspiration:

The researcher drew inspiration from the Welsh Language Awareness website. One section presents real-life scenarios and strategies from Welsh speakers about how they maintain the use of their language in working environments. And readers can engage with the content interactively by flipping digital cards.

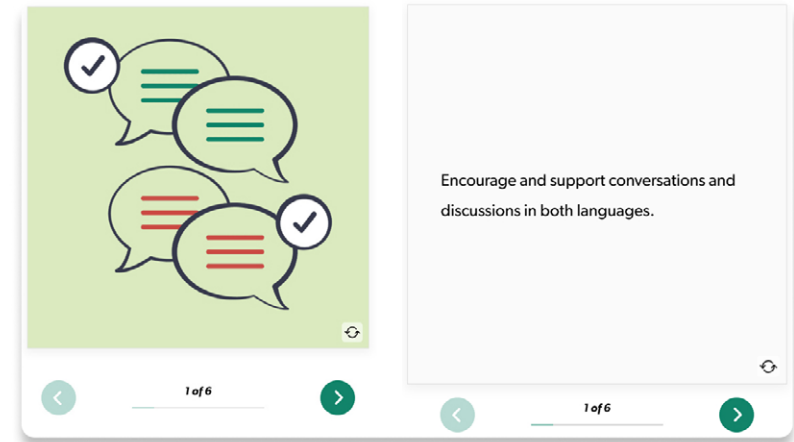
This case inspired the researcher to reflect on the contrasting attitudes toward language among villagers in Yongning and Renhou. While some have lost confidence in passing down their mother tongue, others remain deeply passionate about preserving and using the Nisu Yi language.

## Next Step:

To further understand the villagers' real-life touchpoints, methodologies, and positive attitudes toward language transmission, the researcher will conduct in-depth interviews.

- 01 In-depth Interviews
- 02 Summarize villagers' "methods of transmission / challenges / touchpoints"
- 03 Use these insights to carry out a prototype

Research Tool of How to make the Prototype of Language keepers' tips



Screenshot from <https://socialcare.wales/learning-modules/welsh-language-awareness>

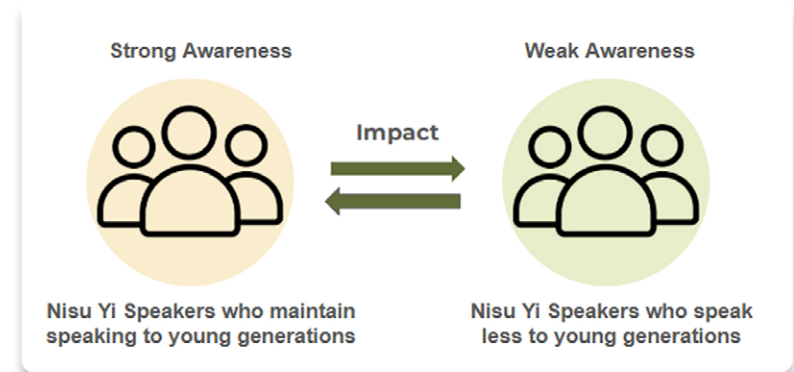


Figure of the new prototype idea

# In-depth Interviews for Prototype 03

## Interview Tools:

The interviews aimed to understand how language transmission happens in real-life contexts.

- When do you usually speak your mother tongue at home? Could you give an example?
- How do you teach your children or grandchildren to speak in Nisu Yi?
- What were the first Yi words your kids learned? Do you still remember them?

To further explore villagers' attitudes toward language loss:

- How would you feel if your children could no longer speak your mother tongue when they grow up?



Photos of In-depth Interviews with villagers

## Nisu Yi Transmission Methods from Villagers:

### 1. Values & Beliefs

"The tones of our mother tongue carry Yi people's emotions."

"Mandarin is for communication, Yi language is for family."

"Speaking half Yi and half Mandarin is also a form of transmission."

"Only our own people will truly care about our language."

"Bilingual children develop stronger language systems."

### 2. Everyday Practices

Meals and drinks are accompanied by Yi songs.

Singing and dancing always include children.

Family gatherings are the best time for mother tongue exchange.

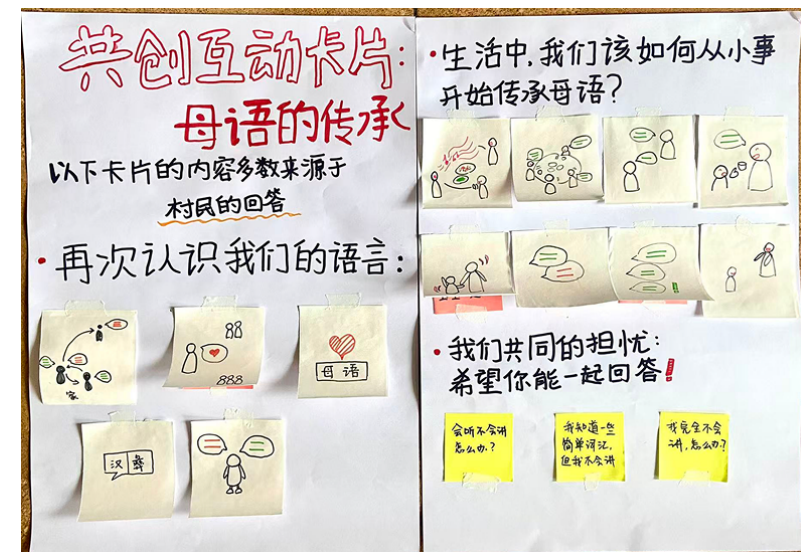
Using Yi language in small routines: "Let's go out and play!"

Conversational learning: one phrase after another, without fear of mistakes.

Repeat simple words in both Yi and Mandarin for reinforcement.

Orange parts are from researcher's point of view

## Prototype Materials:



The first person on the left in the photo is the staff member from Guanlan. The interactive method for prototype testing continues the flip card.

## Key Insights from Prototype 03 Nisu Yi Language Keepers' Tips

*"I can't really understand the drawing on the cards."*

It is difficult to engage with the prototype. They struggled with too much text, couldn't easily interpret the illustrations, and were unfamiliar with the flip-card interaction.

*"I thought this was a playlist!"*

Singing is a form of joyful expression deeply rooted in the community. During the test, one villager spontaneously sang a song written in Nisu Yi, and others listened with great excitement.

*"If our culture can make profits, it would be better."*

The development of culture and language needs to consider long-term sustainability as well as the potential to increase local income.

*"My son can speak Nisu Yi, but I can't. He often reminds me to speak it too, but I no longer have the ability to learn."*

This reflects a generational shift — young people are increasingly aware that their language represents the continuation of their cultural identity and heritage.



Villagers were curious about the prototype materials



One villager was singing his own song, called *What we eat in a Year*

## Reflection:

### This prototype was a mistake — but a beautiful one.

*The initial goal of this prototype was to help participants learn practical tips for language transmission through my designed artefact.*

*Before the test, the researcher was deeply concerned about whether the villagers would understand the design and its intention.*

*In reality, they didn't. However, they clearly understood that the researcher was exploring the loss of their local language. When they started to interact through songs in the village pavilion, that became the true Aha Moment. Through singing, they revealed the key design clue — their deep love for songs, culture, and language.*

*This experience reaffirmed that the research approach "Learning through designing" is effective within the rural Chinese context. Tangible artefacts or frameworks can attract attention, spark curiosity, and open up communication. As a facilitator, the designer can then guide participants to engage naturally within the design process.*

*Although there were many aspects that could be improved, the participants' genuine responses illuminated the right direction for the next phase of development.*



Villagers were reading the tips on the prototype

# Prototype 04: Co-creation a Community Song

## Why?

- Following the insights from the last prototype, this test aimed to further explore whether villagers could use their own language and culture as creative materials within a service context.
- The researcher also intended to encourage participants to express their thoughts on community identity, culture, and language transmission through a co-creation tool for composing a community song.

## What?

- Participants were invited to select two or three keywords related to the values and methods of language transmission.
- Using the song previously learned in NYECC as prototype material ensured that the participants were already familiar with the content.
- The activity was designed as homework, allowing them time to reflect and create in their own pace.

## According to friend's feedback, iterating prototype:



邀请您把《采花调》改编为《彝声传承调》

用你选的词作为填词引导，再用你自己的话，把下面《采花调》的片段改成有关彝语传承的歌词！

第二段 | 5 56 1 12 | 6.1 6 5 |

3 5 6 1 | 2 35 32 1 | 2 35 32 1 | 2 - |

在框里填词

Prototype Materials: Music Sheet as Prototype tool

- Nisu Yi Community
- Remember with heart
- Talk with children with mother language
- We
- You say one thing, I say one thing (chatting)
- I will say it even if I can.

彝家人 会说一句，  
~~母语~~ 也要说  
 用心记 ~~不害羞~~  
 出去有自信 亲切  
~~不能忘~~ 跟娃娃说  
 家的声音  
~~家乡~~ 你一句，  
 我一句  
~~中华文化~~  
 祖先的声音  
~~瑰宝~~ 珍贵 我们

Prototype Materials: Keywords for guiding participants to create lyrics

## How did participants respond?

*"We don't know how to do it, afraid of writing it wrong."*



*"Actually, it's quite simple."*

*"I don't need these words anymore, I'll fill them out myself when I go back."*

### Reflection:

Participants' reactions evolved over time — they began to show genuine interest in the design.

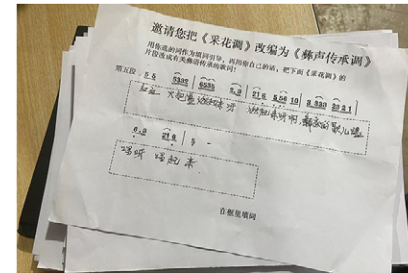
At first, when the researcher handed out the prototype materials, some participants seemed hesitant and unsure.

However, after being patiently briefed on how to complete the "homework," several participants became more engaged and even took the initiative to select their own keywords. At this moment, it felt as though the service had truly begun to onboard.

## Outcome:

# 9/42

Distributed 42 lyric sheets, received 9 completed versions.



*"Light the torches, glowing bright, Yi songs rising through the night!"*

— lyrics from a participant

### Key Insights:

- Showing the strong emotional connection to their community and mother language
- Participation barrier: writing and lyrics composition are not accessible for most of them

### Summary:

Up to Prototype 04, the focus has been on direct interaction with villagers.

To further expand the service system, the next step will involve deeper engagement and dialogue with stakeholders.

# Interviews with Village Committee in Yongning

## Introduction of Village Committee:

The Village Committee is a self-governed grassroots organization elected by residents of each administrative village in China. The Yongning Village Committee is mainly responsible for organizing annual community events such as the Torch Festival for the Nisu Yi community.

## Key Insights:

*“Nisu Yi language is mainly passed on within families, while community-based language activities are rare.”*

### Need more community-based transmission activities:

Nisu Yi language is mainly passed down within families or through a few dedicated Yi culture enthusiasts, while large-scale, community-based language activities remain limited.

*“Ideally, having one or two Yi language communicating events each year would be the best.”*

### Community aspiration for more events:

The committee envisions holding language events each year to strengthen community cohesion and raise awareness of the importance of preserving the mother tongue.

*“If there were rewards, villagers would definitely participate more actively.”*

### Rewards can enhance motivations:

As most villagers are occupied with farming or work, introducing small rewards or recognition could significantly increase participation in language-related activities.



Interviewing with the staff in Yongning Village Committee

# Reflection

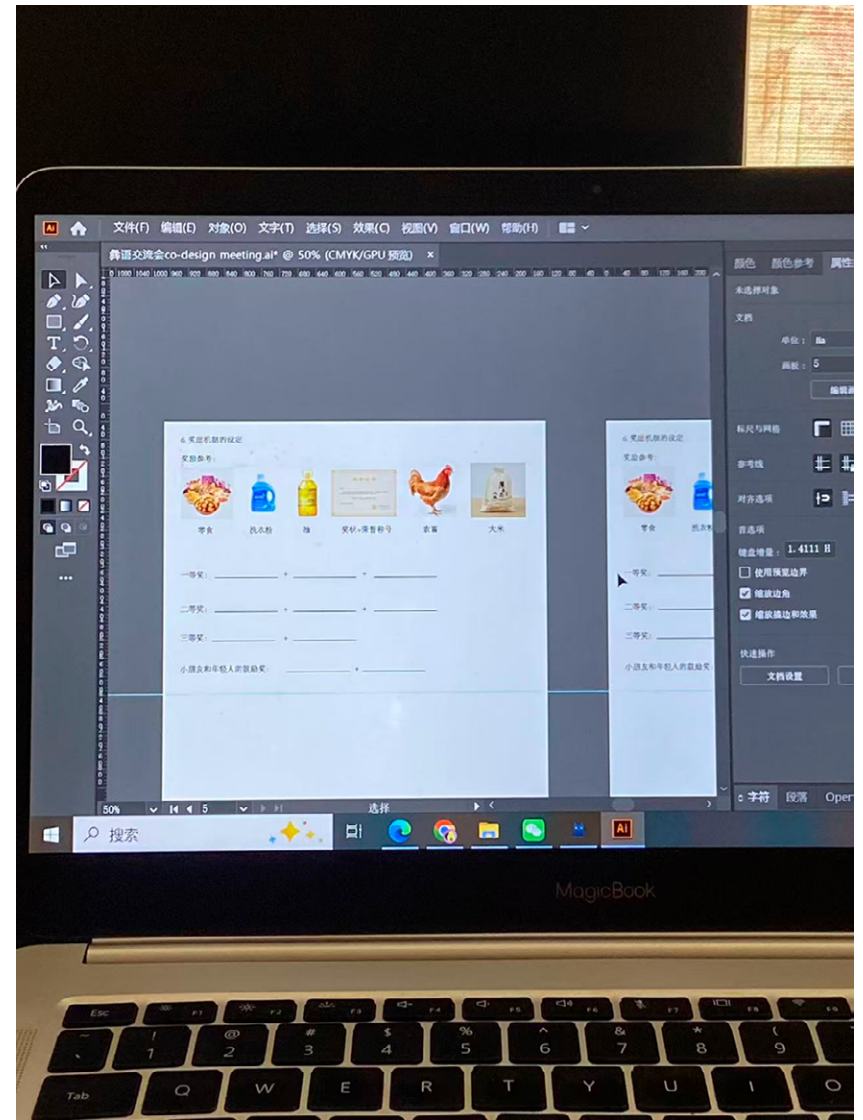
The visuals and interaction methods of co-design tools need to adapt to the local context.

Reflecting on my learning experience in the UK, co-design tools are usually colourful and visually engaging. When I first conducted co-discovery and prototype sessions in China, I also used A3 paper and colourful markers to communicate visually with participants.

However, during my interviews at the village committee, I closely observed the stationery they use and the way they normally work. I realised that their documents rarely contain visual graphics, and their working environment does not feature trendy visual posters.

This made me aware that using overly stylish visual tools might create unnecessary distance between us. Therefore, I decided that all subsequent co-design tools would adopt a “black text on white paper” format, using question-and-answer prompts—tools that match their familiar visual environment and communication habits.

In practice, this visual shift proved highly effective. First, participants felt more comfortable reading the co-design materials. Second, the interaction became similar to an interview process: if participants found writing difficult, I could assist them, and they could still easily express their thoughts and opinions.



This was really interesting experience, so I took a picture of it

# Co-design Nisu Yi Language Festival

## Why?

According to the village committee's vision, the researcher identified that a mother tongue celebration festival could be one of the final service outcomes of the project. This co-design session aimed to further validate the feasibility of this idea, understand stakeholders' perspectives, and advance the project outcomes.

## What?

The co-design tools were developed around the following questions:

- When would be the most suitable time to hold the festival? Where should it take place?
- What would a Nisu Yi festival look like to you? For example, would it include games or tongue twisters?
- During the event, if someone cannot speak Nisu Yi, how should that be handled?
- How should the reward mechanism be designed?

如果在仁厚和永宁有一个彝语交流会比赛

1. 你希望在哪里办?  
 举办时间: 你希望什么时候举办? 请填写日期(YYYY-MM-DD)  
 \_\_\_\_月 \_\_\_\_日 \_\_\_\_时 \_\_\_\_分 \_\_\_\_秒  
 举办地点: 在哪里?  
 永宁村  
 永宁镇  
 永宁乡  
 其他: \_\_\_\_\_

2. 你希望做什么活动?  
 唱歌跳舞  
 讲故事  
 玩游戏  
 其他: \_\_\_\_\_

3. 你希望有什么奖励?  
 奖品: 你希望有什么奖品? 请填写奖品名称(如: 现金、物品、证书等) \_\_\_\_\_  
 奖品数量: 你希望有多少奖品? 请填写数量(如: 100、200、300) \_\_\_\_\_

4. 你希望有什么奖励?  
 奖品: 你希望有什么奖品? 请填写奖品名称(如: 现金、物品、证书等) \_\_\_\_\_  
 奖品数量: 你希望有多少奖品? 请填写数量(如: 100、200、300) \_\_\_\_\_

5. 你希望有什么奖励?  
 奖品: 你希望有什么奖品? 请填写奖品名称(如: 现金、物品、证书等) \_\_\_\_\_  
 奖品数量: 你希望有多少奖品? 请填写数量(如: 100、200、300) \_\_\_\_\_

Co-design Materials

## How did the NYECC respond?

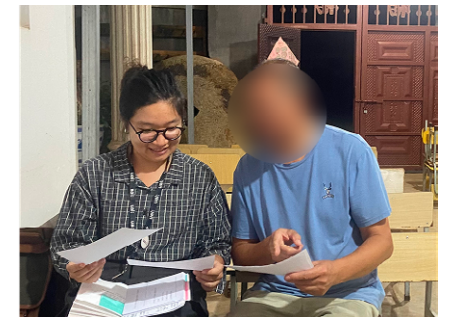
**"The Torch Festival is the time when the village is most crowded each year, with many visitors as well."**

**"Every year at the Torch Festival it's always the same. If there could be a small part about language heritage, that would be wonderful!"**

**"We used to play many language games as kids — now they could be useful again!"**

## Key Insights:

- Language celebration could align with existing local festivals for better engagement.
- Participants desire to bring new meaning into traditional events.
- Language heritage can be used as tools for community connection.



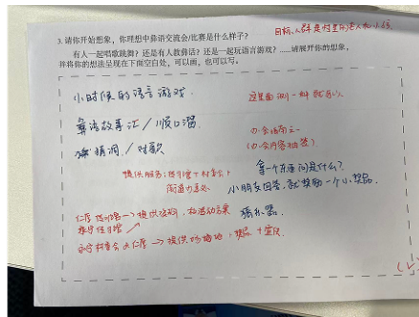
## How did the Renhou village committee respond?

**"I think the idea is great, especially considering those who don't speak Yi. With many tourists at the Torch Festival, it's a chance for them to learn our language!"**

**"A colleague and I are already recording our traditional songs and sharing them on a Tiktok account."**

### Key Insights:

- Nisu Yi Language Festival can be the connection between Nisu Yi community & Tourists to expand the people's awareness of language heritage.
- Villagers have already auto- archived the audio and video recordings on social media.



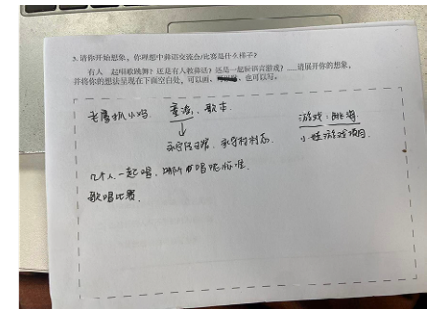
## How did the Yongning village committee respond?

**"This event can be simple, for example teaching children Yi traditional songs."**

**"Our village committee funds the Torch Festival every year; this year's budget is about 1 million RMB."**

### Key Insights:

- The village committee already invests substantial resources in existing cultural events.
- Smaller and manageable initiatives can be easily to connect villagers.



## Prototype 05: Nisu Yi Language Festival

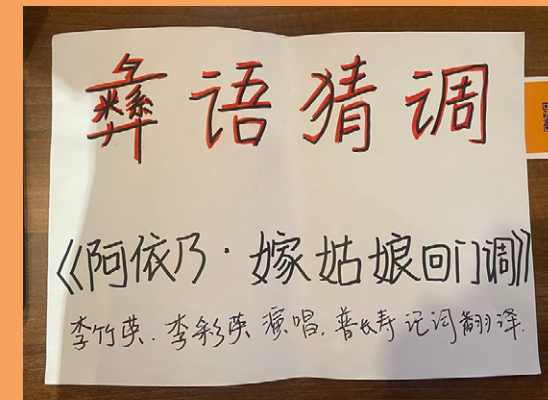
### Aims:

To test whether most villagers can participate in the activity, identify if there are any communication barriers, and observe their level of interest.

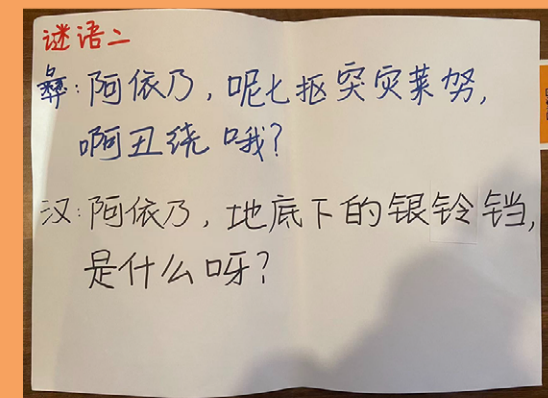
### What?

Using language materials collected from within the NYECC, including a traditional song titled *Ayi Nai: The Bride's Homecoming Tune*. The song contains riddles about local crops and farming tools that villagers are familiar with.

- One poster announced that this activity will take place on the day of the Torch Festival, inviting everyone to join the Nisu Yi language interaction.
- Six A3-sized sheets introducing the origin of the song and its riddles, including Chinese and Nisu Yi (Using Chinese as pronunciation).
- Two certificates to reward participants who guess the most riddles correctly.



Yi Tune: *Ayinai- Bride's Homecoming Song*, performed by Li Caiying & Li Zhuying, recorded and translated by Pu.



"Ayinai, what is the silver bell underground?"

## Observation:

- They initially lacked confidence to engage with this game, because they thought they couldn't answer it.
- But they later realized that the riddles were very close to their daily life and culture.
- After some discussion, they began actively guessing the riddles.
- They participated enthusiastically and understood both how to play and the purpose of the activity.
- Each time they guessed correctly, they would explain it to me in Yi language and slowly teach me how to say it.

## Key insights:

### Familiarity builds confidence.

When they recognized the riddles were based on their daily life and culture, they became more confident and engaged.

### Cultural connection enhances participation.

The use of traditional songs and local knowledge transformed the activity from a “game” into a shared cultural experience.

### Learning became reciprocal.

As villagers explained the riddles in Yi language and taught pronunciation, the interaction turned into a two-way learning process between the community and researcher.

### Simple formats can foster inclusion.

A light, playful activity like riddles successfully involved participants of different ages and language abilities, showing potential for larger festival-scale engagement.

## Summary:

The co-design and prototype confirmed that a Nisu Yi Language Festival—integrated into the Torch Festival, rooted in daily-life language knowledge, and supported by all three village committees—can meaningfully engage villagers, foster cultural pride, and create inclusive, playful ways for the community and visitors to learn the language together.



# Prototype 06: Nisu Yi Language Festival Implementation Guide

When the researcher returned to London and began discussing the project with peers and tutors, their feedback further encouraged adopting a longer-term perspective in designing the service outcomes.

***“The most important part is the output of the co-design. If villagers have a platform to share their workshops — and if other communities can also contribute — it could generate many more workshop ideas.”***

***“It’s worth considering how NYECC or the community could amplify their impact on language revitalization. This would also help them secure more funding and support.”***

***“I think post-festival maintenance is also crucial.”***

## Next Step:

The researcher will analyse the new knowledge generated through the prototype journey and identify opportunities within the community, forming a set of design principles unique to the Nisu Yi community.

## Nisu Yi Language Festival Implementation Guide

- Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre
- Yongning & Renhou Village Committee
- Guanlan Subdistrict Administration

### 01 For NYECC

#### Workshop Ideas

The following activity ideas come from co-creation with Renhou Culture Centre and the village committees. They are provided here as inspiration:

- Yi culture knowledge quiz for children
- Traditional Yi language guessing games
- Yi folktales sharing session
- Yi tongue twisters
- On-site teaching of Yi songs
- On-site teaching of simple Yi expressions
- Childhood games combined with the Yi language
- Sharing Yi idioms and sayings
- Yi song duets

If you come up with new ideas, please keep it into Language Revitalization Workshop Archive.

#### Workshop Design

##### Step 1: Brainstorming Your Ideas

From the reference list above, choose the 2-3 you are interested in. Or you can also suggest your own ideas.

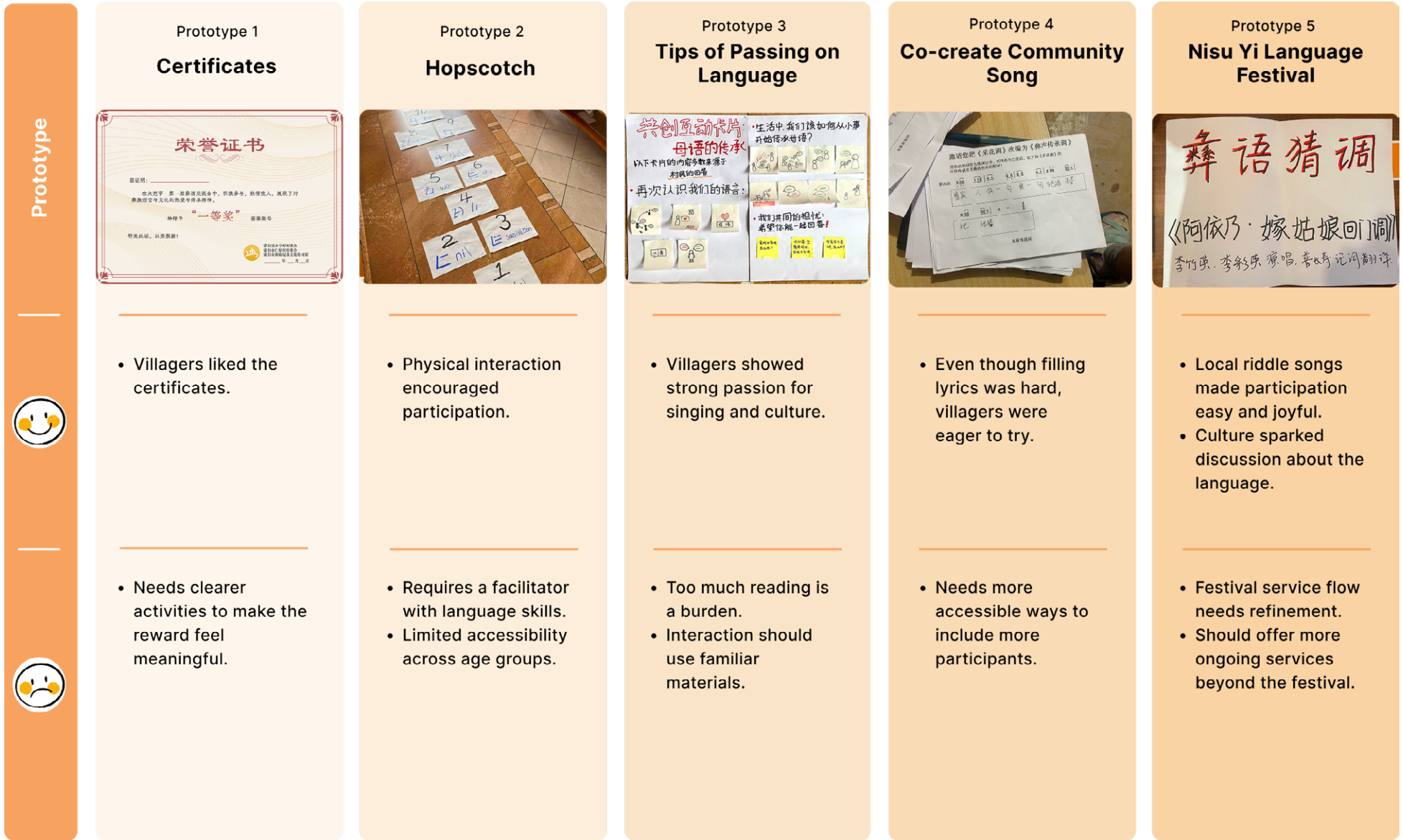
##### Step 2: Select the Final Idea

Pick three activities you would like to host, then rank them by priority. Draw an axis chart on your paper to help decide which one is easiest to carry out and most connected to language.

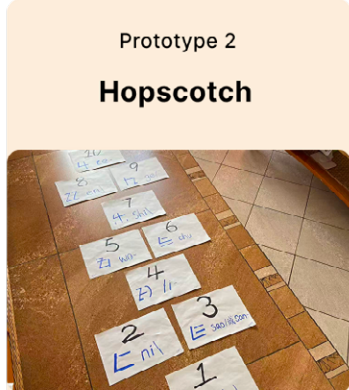


**05**  
**REDEFINE**

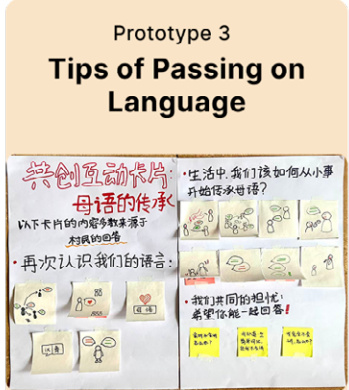
# Prototype Journey Map



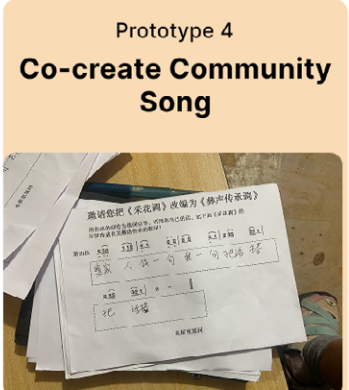
- Villagers liked the certificates.
- Needs clearer activities to make the reward feel meaningful.



- Physical interaction encouraged participation.
- Requires a facilitator with language skills.
- Limited accessibility across age groups.



- Villagers showed strong passion for singing and culture.
- Too much reading is a burden.
- Interaction should use familiar materials.



- Even though filling lyrics was hard, villagers were eager to try.
- Needs more accessible ways to include more participants.



- Local riddle songs made participation easy and joyful.
- Culture sparked discussion about the language.
- Festival service flow needs refinement.
- Should offer more ongoing services beyond the festival.

# Design Principles

Developing

Place-based Discover



## Language revitalization should be community-based and supported by trusted facilitators.

Within the Nisu Yi context, language revitalization must be rooted locally. As most villagers are less educated and have limited habits of reading long texts, family-based transmission alone is not sufficient to sustain meaningful impact.

Therefore, community-driven efforts are essential, supported by credible facilitators such as NYECC. NYECC staff possess deep familiarity with local villagers, culture, and language, along with long-established trust. Their experience conducting language revitalization workshops enables them to independently design and implement language activities.



## Language revitalization must be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and culture.

Across multiple prototypes, the most effective way to encourage active participation was to use Indigenous culture and local knowledge as the agency of language revitalization.

This approach is more inclusive and connected to daily life, enabling villagers to engage in conversation around their own language and lived experiences, ultimately fostering deeper participation.



## The design should minimise reliance on technological tools.

NYECC's digital literacy is mainly limited to basic office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint). To ensure the service can be implemented, the design must reduce dependence on complex technologies and instead adapt to widely used tools within the Chinese context, such as WeChat. Its built-in functions already support basic needs for online archiving and information sharing.



## Language revitalization requires a long-term developmental perspective.

Revitalizing a language requires long-term, sustained efforts to generate meaningful change. Key components of this long-term ecosystem include regular documentation of the Nisu language, post-festival maintenance, and the potential for villagers to generate income through future language-related festivals. These elements together contribute to building a sustainable and resilient revitalisation environment.



## Language revitalization methods should be shared and co-created across communities.

During the co-design process, NYECC introduced many workshop practices from other regions, demonstrating how tested approaches can benefit other minority-language communities.

Similarly, early research showed that other Yi communities often rely on limited forms of language workshops. Cross-community knowledge sharing therefore creates valuable opportunities for developing more diverse and sustainable methods of language revitalization.

Project scoping

**06**  
***DELIVERY***

# Service Concept

## What is the service?

*Voices of Roots* is a year-round, community-led service system that supports the revitalisation of the Nisu Yi language through online archiving, place-based celebration and promotion. It provides the tools, touchpoints, and processes that help communities document, share, and sustain their mother tongue in everyday life.

## Who is the service for?

- Nisu Yi community.
- NYECC.
- Other minority language communities.
- Urban Audiences & tourists.

## Where does the service take place?

- Online — via the NYECC WeChat Official Account, digital workshop archive, reflection tools, and the Nisu Yi Digital Museum.
- In Yongning & Renhou village — through community-led language workshops and the annual Nisu Yi Language Festival.
- In urban public spaces — through leaflets and posters placed at the Honghe Prefectural Museum and Guanlan Subdistrict Community Service Center.



Logo of *Voices of Roots* , designed by author

# Touchpoint 01: Wechat Official Account

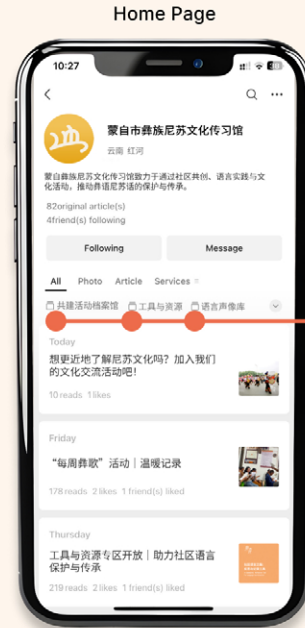
## Aims:

- To amplify the community's ongoing efforts in Nisu Yi language revitalization.
- Facilitate exchange and knowledge-sharing across different minority language communities.
- Provide functions for archiving and cross-community sharing of language revitalization workshops.
- Improve accessibility to audio recordings and establish a publicly accessible, continuously updated language archive.
- Support communities' ongoing reflection during the revitalization process by offering tools and resources.

## Introduction:

As one of the core service touchpoints of *Voices of Roots*, the NYECC WeChat Official Account (Wechat OA) organizes archives, shares toolkits and language resources that allow more people to know the Nisu Yi language and access revitalization-related tools.

## Main Functions:



## 1. Workshop Information Page

WeChat OA can share updates on upcoming activities, inviting more people to join Nisu Yi language workshops. Currently, NYECC posts schedules mainly through Moments and group chats. Using the official account makes workshop information easier to access and helps reach a wider audience beyond existing social circles.

### Archive Submission Invitation



### Online Form Website



## 2. Workshop Archive Collection Flow:





### 3-1. Toolkits Page

When users access the official WeChat account, they can scan the QR code on the Toolkits Page, which redirects them to Baidu Cloud to download the language revitalization toolkits.



Detailed Tool Information Can Be Found In The Appendix.

### 3-2. Downloadable Toolkits

The toolkits include editable *Word* versions of the Language Workshop Archive and the Reflection Tool. Users can fill them in following the templates provided.

*The Language Workshop Archive* is same as the online workshop form. Community can use it privately to record local language workshop methods. It helps users systematically document the community's language revitalization practices.

*The Reflection Tool* captures participants' changing attitudes toward their local language and tracks shifts through simple data. Together, these tools aim to amplify the visibility and impact of community-led language revitalization efforts.



### 4. Nisu Yi Culture Digital Museum

This WeChat OA platform enables the publication of videos, audio recordings, and images. Leveraging this social media channel, the project documents Nisu Yi language and culture, making these resources more visible and accessible to a wider audience.

# Touchpoint 02: Nisu Yi Language Festival

## Aims:

- Foster pride in the mother tongue.
- Encourage sharing of local history and culture.
- Strengthen community connections.
- Introduce Nisu Yi culture to visiting tourists.

## Introduction:

Held alongside the Yi Torch Festival, the Nisu Yi Language Festival lets the community celebrate their culture while engaging in mother tongue activities. NYECC, as the main workshop facilitator, leverages its cultural resources and experience to design language activities that help residents rediscover and take pride in their language.



## Implementation Guide

It serves as a practical implementation framework that supports local stakeholders in designing, coordinating, and facilitating a community-led language celebration. It provides step-by-step activity design methods and clear checklists to ensure preparation and execution.



## Poster

NYECC can post the poster within the village or publish it via the WeChat OA and private networks to invite broader participation.

The poster is provided in PowerPoint format to allow the service provider to easily update and localise content.





### Introduction:

This leaflet introduces NYECC's activities, shares narratives of language revitalisation, and provides event locations and contact information. It is distributed in urban areas to connect the Nisu Yi community with a wider audience.

### Distribution:

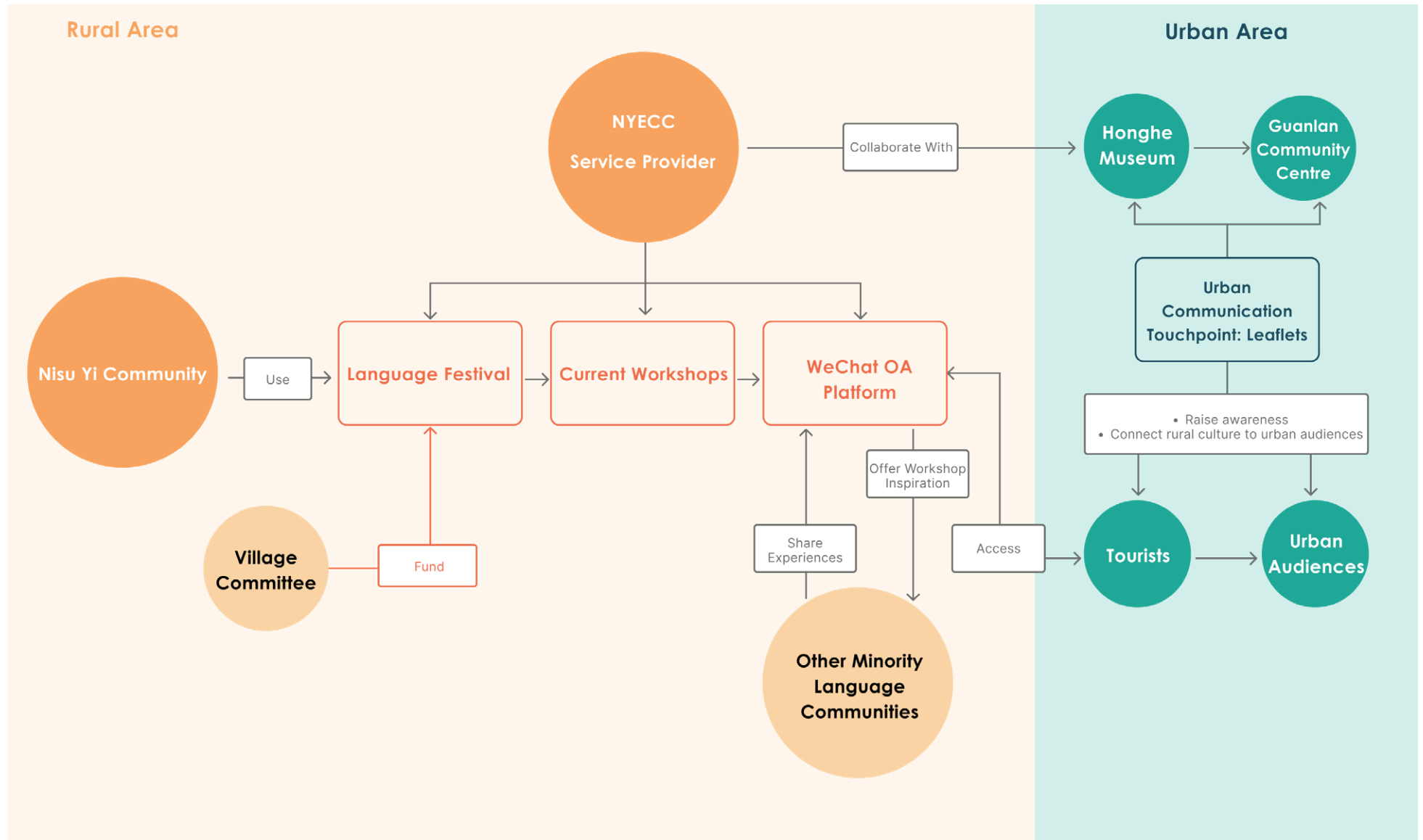
The leaflet will be placed at Honghe Prefectural Museum and Guanlan Subdistrict Community Service Center, making it accessible to both tourists and local residents.

### Aims:

- Raise awareness of Nisu Yi culture and language among city residents and visitors
- Promote engagement with NYECC's community-led activities
- Serve as a medium to extend the impact of local language revitalisation efforts beyond the village

## Touchpoint 03: Leaflets in Urban Area

# Service Ecosystem Map



# Multi-Stakeholder Service Journey Map 01

Showing how different actors engage with the service ecosystem across time.

	Pre-Festival Preparation & Awareness	Festival Engagement	Post-Festival Reflection & Continuation	Long-term Sustained Revitalization Ecosystem
NYECC Service Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online &amp; offline announcements through WeChat OA &amp; Posters</li> <li>• Shares festival info &amp; schedules with communities</li> <li>• Builds early awareness &amp; motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate workshops and activities</li> <li>• Guides language-based interactions for villagers and visitors</li> <li>• Strengthen confidence &amp; Culture sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using reflection tool to collect data</li> <li>• share outcomes through Wechat OA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the annual revitalization system: workshops, archives, training courses, and continuous documentation.</li> </ul>
Villagers Primary Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive festival information through NYECC Wechat OA</li> <li>• prepare for participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Join language workshops &amp; activities</li> <li>• Contribute local knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive festival certificates and small prizes, reinforcing a sense of achievement.</li> <li>• Provide reflections; strengthen interest in joining future festivals.</li> </ul>	<p>Continue following NYECC, potentially returning for future cultural events.</p>
Tourists Secondary Users	<p>Support NYECC with planning, coordination, and logistics.</p>	<p>Provide administrative support &amp; ensure smooth operations.</p>	<p>Review festival outcomes &amp; community feedback.</p>	<p>Collaborate with NYECC to sustain annual community activities.</p>

# Multi-Stakeholder Service Journey Map 02

	Pre-Festival Preparation & Awareness	Festival Engagement	Pre-Festival Reflection & Continuation	Long-term Sustained Revitalization Ecosystem
Village Committee Local Governance	Support NYECC with planning, coordination, and logistics.	Provide administrative support & ensure smooth operations.	Review festival outcomes & community feedback.	Collaborate with NYECC to sustain annual community activities.
Guanlan Community Centre Urban Institutional Support	Support NYECC with venue, communication, and distribution of leaflets.	Offer assistance & visitor services.	Promote festival outcomes in local urban networks.	Continue as an external supporting hub for cultural visibility.
Other endangered language communities Knowledge- sharing network	Get inspired by NYECC's approaches through the workshop archive.	Observe or learn from festival practices as reference.	Explore NYECC's shared reflection and archive materials.	Engage in a cross-community knowledge-sharing network on language revitalization.

# Value Proposition Map



Strengthening community cultural confidence:

- Creating festival and community settings where villagers naturally use their mother tongue.
- Increasing visibility of the language through online displays of cultural resources and stories.

Recording and showcasing community efforts:

- The Reflection Tool captures each activity and yearly changes.
- The Archive visualises experiences from multiple communities, building a shared collective memory.

Supporting cross-community connection and sharing:

- The Archive enables minority language communities to exchange cases and inspiration.
- Forming a revitalisation network where communities are no longer isolated.

Providing a continuous, year-round revitalisation pathway:

- Offering a structured and reusable process for community-led activities.
- Ensuring activities are not one-off events but part of a consistent, ongoing system.



# Storyboard



1. Lin is a Nisu Yi woman living in Mengzi City. One weekend, she brought her child to visit the Honghe Prefectural Museum.



2. At the museum's information desk, she noticed there was a leaflet about NYECC. When she opened it, she unexpectedly saw familiar faces from her hometown.



3. She scanned the QR code in the booklet and followed NYECC's WeChat OA. Then she found a poster for the Nisu Yi Language Festival — scheduled on the same day as the Torch Festival.



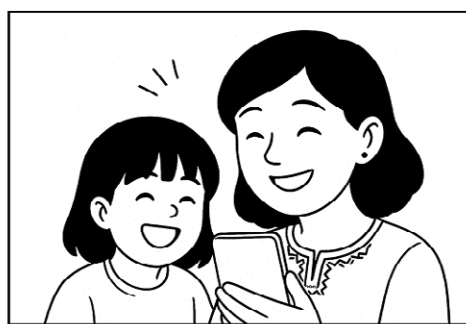
4. On the day of the festival, Lin and her child joined the activities. Her child was thrilled, and Lin rediscovered the joy of speaking Nisu Yi like she did with her childhood friends.



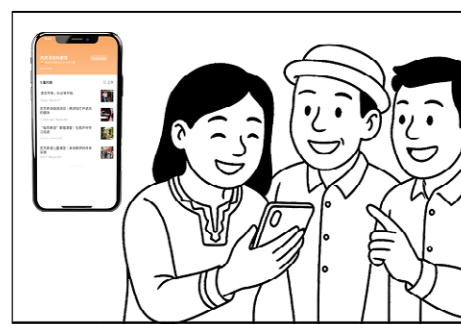
5. Everyone spoke in their mother tongue that day. The atmosphere was relaxed and lively, filling Lin with a long-forgotten sense of familiarity and happiness.



6. After the festival, Lin continued to follow NYECC's updates. Whenever the information was posted, she brought her child to participate the language workshop whenever possible.



7. One day, she saw a photo of herself and her child recorded in the workshop archive on the WeChat OA. At that moment, she felt truly proud — as if she had genuinely become part of the language revitalization effort.

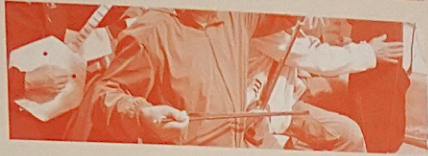


8. Lin shared NYECC's WeChat OA with Yi friends living in other regions. They explored workshop archives from different communities, and began discussing how to initiate similar revitalization activities in their own hometowns.

Comics are from Chatgpt

# ENDANGERED

ual: London College of Communication



# LANGUAGES



彝声  
Voices of  
Roots



# REVITALIZATION

Nisu Yi Community  
In Yongning & Renhou Village, Yunnan, China

**We+ (♥)** #Impactequation


**Voices of Roots**

Based on the 'Cultural Legacy of Cultural Preservation and Revitalization'...

This service system, developed with the Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre in Mengzi, Yunnan, China aims to revitalize the endangered Nisu Yi language. Through a year-long journey of research, digital archives, books, and community festivals, the service connects people with their linguistic roots & encourages the community to research, document, and sustain their mother tongue, strengthening confidence and pride in their language.

**Project Partner**  
Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre (NICEC) in Mengzi, Yunnan, China

**Client**  
Guangao Yi  
www.guangao.com



Can you give any thoughts on this project? If you write in our questionnaire about your mother language, we will share them with you.

This is such a beautiful project I made me think about my cultural language & how with time I don't speak much of it. Would love to know more. — MISTARA

ual: London College of Communication

Share Your Thoughts Here!

Can you give any thoughts on this project? If you write in our questionnaire about your mother language, we will share them with you.

It's nice that you have done this. I'm interested in the Nisu Yi language. I would like to know more about it. I would like to know more about it. I would like to know more about it.

ual: London College of Communication

In the Nisu Yi Community Yunnan, China

Guangao Yi  
181 Service Design Co., Ltd.



彝声

Lyrics From Nisu Yi Community

Located in Yongning & Renhou Village, Yunnan, China



ual: London College of Communication

壹 One

Yongning Nisu Yi Language



## Feedback From Degree Show

*“The final deliverables are excellent — they truly fit the local context!”*

— One Student from RCA

*“This project reminded me of my childhood language, but now I don’t speak much of it.”*

— Mustafa, MA User Experience Design

*“This Reflection Tool is actually very strong. By tracking changes over time, it can help NYECC secure more funding and support.”*

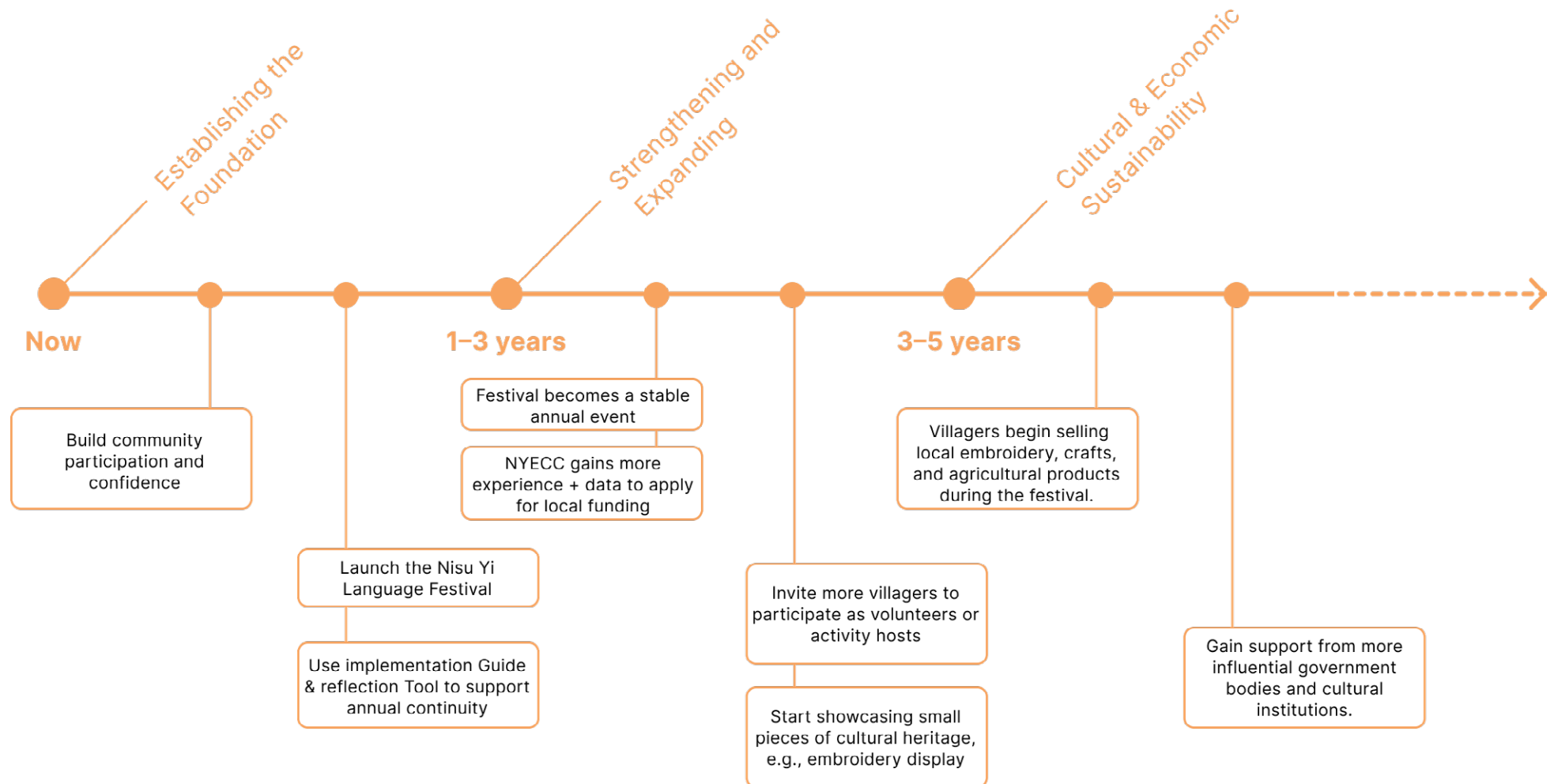
— Brandon Jiang

*“I’m really glad that your outcome is grounded in a community-based perspective. When local culture is so distinct from others, it naturally becomes part of tourism.”*

— Xinyi Wu, MA Design for Social Innovation and Sustainable Futures

# Future Road Map

*Voices of Roots* began as a community-centred set of services supporting language revitalization. As internal community activities continue to grow and external cultural visibility increases, the Nisu Yi Language Festival has the potential to evolve into a distinctive cultural event. In the long term, villagers may introduce small-scale economic activities during the festival—such as selling local embroidery, traditional crafts, and agricultural products. This would not only generate additional income opportunities but also ensure that cultural heritage and community identity remain at the heart of the festival experience.



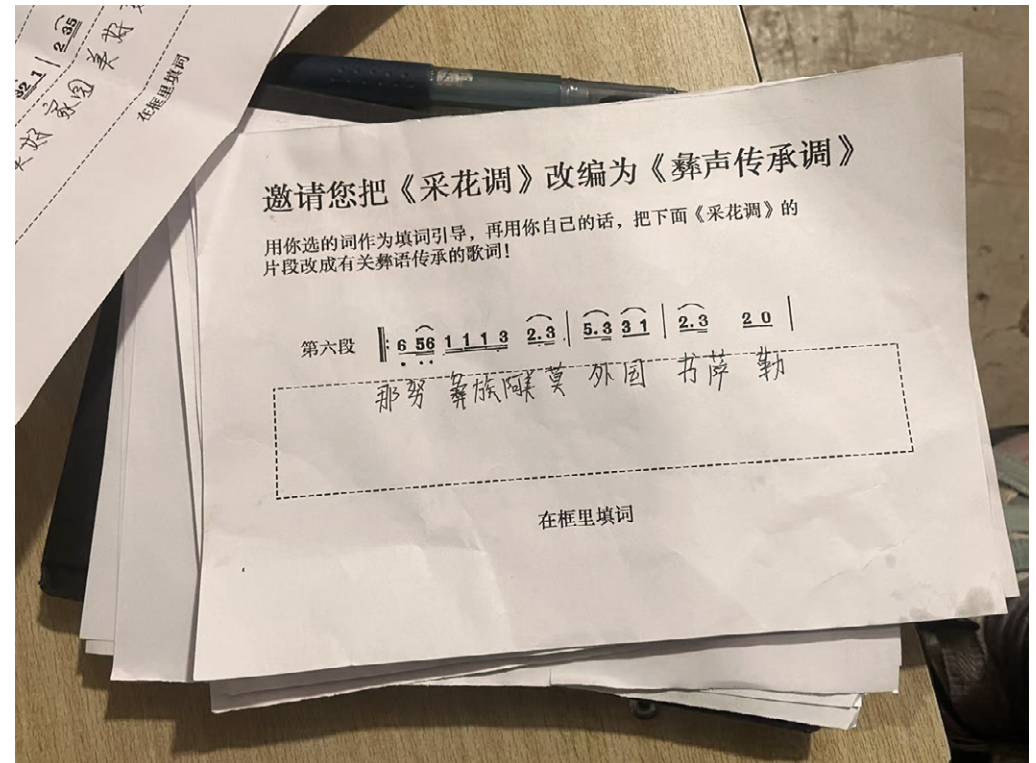
# Conclusion

This project marked my first experience independently carrying out a full service design process. Through exploring the revitalization of the Nisu Yi language, I applied the theories and methodologies learned in MA Service Design such as systems thinking, participatory design, co-creation tools, and community-based approaches to a real socio-cultural context. This allowed me to understand how these frameworks function in practice, and how their effectiveness shifts across different cultural and geographical settings.

More importantly, this journey became a process of reconnecting with my own cultural identity. Every conversation with villagers and every moment of collaboration with NYECC participants reminded me that language is far more than a communication tool—it is a vessel of memory, emotion, and collective belonging. Even though my upbringing and daily environment differ greatly from those in the village, the warmth with which they taught me their words and shared their stories revealed the enduring strength of cultural roots.

Looking back, this project not only resulted in a sustainable service system but also aims to support communities in continuously documenting, celebrating, and sustaining our mother tongue. I hope it provides a space where their language can be seen, heard, and valued. While challenges remain, I believe that with the commitment of local stakeholders, the strength of the community itself, and the role of design as a bridge and catalyst, language revitalization can become a long-term and meaningful cultural practice.

Ultimately, this journey has been both a design exploration and a return to self. It reaffirmed my belief that the power of design lies in solving problems also in connecting people, strengthening cultural confidence, and amplifying voices that deserve to be heard.



One auntie wrote me a short message in Nisu Yi language:  
"na nu yip cup ap mai mop, wait gop su sat lep!"  
("You are a Nisu Yi girl who went abroad to study!")

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# ***APPENDIX***

# Ethnographic Photographs

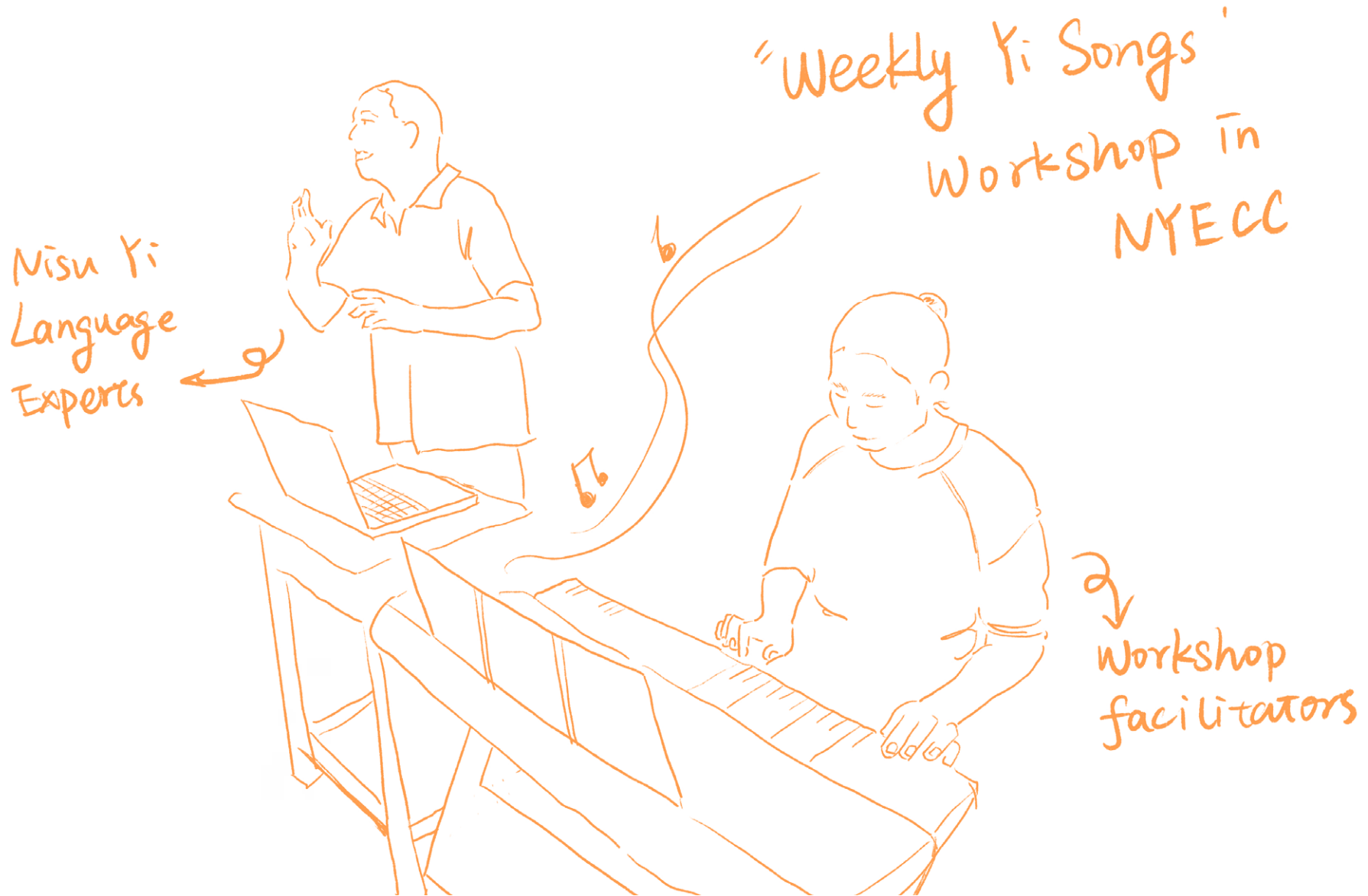


Yi embroidery



Yi folk legend

# Organizers in NYECC



# Toolkit 01: Language Revitalization Workshop Archive



语言复兴活动

记录档案

Language Revitalization Workshop  
Archive

设计：易观涛

Designed by Guantao Yi

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

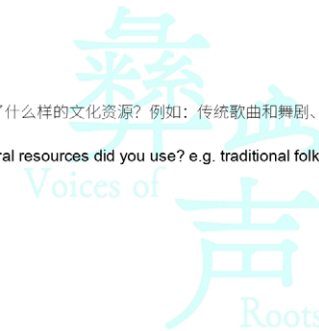
Year: \_\_\_\_\_

1. 关于你们少数民族语言的活动主题是什么？例如，唱歌、艺术绘画、谜语等。

What is your workshop theme? e.g. songs/ art/ riddles.

2. 你们使用了什么样的文化资源？例如：传统歌曲和舞剧、儿时的语言等

What cultural resources did you use? e.g. traditional folks



3. 你们是如何准备这场活动的？例如，唱歌活动，需要准备音响、歌词本、乐器等。

How did you prepare this workshop? What materials or tools did you prepare?  
e.g. papers/ pens/ microphone/ speaker

4. 你的感受是什么？How did you feel during the workshop?

分享你的感受，你可以分享你与参与者互动的过程；你在活动的过程中碰到了哪些困难，是怎么解决的？

Share your emotions, moments of joy, or challenges you faced while leading or joining the activity

5. 你对这次活动有什么反思？What did you reflect on after this workshop?

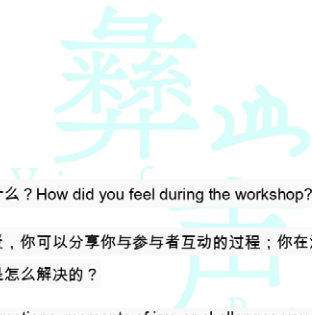
思考你从这次活动中学到了什么？这次活动有改变参与者对少数民族语言的想法吗？

What did you learn from this workshop? Did it change how you see your language, community or yourself?

6. 分享你举办活动的照片！Share your pictures with us!

注意：如果有人不愿意公开面容，记住给他们打上马赛克。

Note: Please blur people's faces if they prefer not to appear.



# Toolkit 02: A Community Reflection Tool for Language Revitalization

5. 你对这次活动有什么反思？What did you reflect on after this workshop?

思考你从这次活动中学到了什么？这次活动有改变参与者对少数民族语言的想法吗？

What did you learn from this workshop? Did it change how you see your language, community or yourself?



6. 分享你举办活动的照片！Share your pictures with us!

注意：如果有人不愿意公开面容，记住给他们打上马赛克。

Note: Please blur people's faces if they prefer not to appear.



## 社区语言之路：

## 反思与记录工具

### A Community Reflection Tool for Language Revitalization

设计：易观涛

Designed by Guantao Yi

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

ual: london college  
of communication

## About the Reflection Tool

### 关于反思工具

This tool is designed to help communities and organizations reflect on their language revitalization over time.

本工具旨在帮助社区和机构在长期的语言复兴过程中进行阶段性的反思与记录。

It provides a simple framework to record local events, observations, and stories — helping you track small but meaningful changes that show how your community's connection with its language grows year by year.

它提供了一个简易的框架，用于记录在地活动、观察与故事——帮助你追踪那些细微却重要的变化，展现社区与母语之间的联系如何一年一年地逐步增强。

Use this diary at the end of each season or year to note what has happened:

请在每个季节或年度结束时使用本日记记录发生的事情：

- Who took part in your activities?  
谁参与了这些活动？
  
- What new traditions emerged?  
出现了哪些新的传统？
  
- How are people's feelings toward your language changing?  
人们对母语的情感和态度发生了怎样的变化？

These notes will become a valuable record of your collective effort and amplify the long-term impact of your work in keeping your language alive.

这些记录将成为你们集体努力的宝贵档案，并进一步放大你们在守护语言方面的长期影响力。

1. Date | 日期:
2. Location | 地点:
3. Event / Activity | 活动 / 事件:
4. Community Engagement | 社区参与情况
  - Purpose | 目的: Record how your community took part in language activities.  
记录社区成员如何参与语言相关的活动。
  - Number of Participants | 参与人数: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Description / Highlights | 描述 / 亮点:

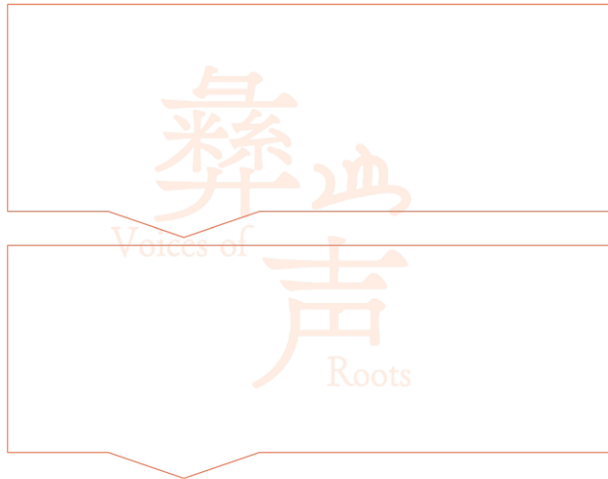
### 5. People's Perception | 人们的认知与感受

**Purpose 目的: Capture people's feeling**

记录人们对本民族语言的态度与情感变化。

Here you could record people's quotes.

此处可记录人们的原话、表达或故事片段。



### 6. Observing These Changes in Our Community | 观察社区中的这些变化

Think about not only this event/activity, but also what you notice in daily life — your observations, people's actions, attitudes, and any small signs of change.

请思考的不仅是这次活动本身，也包括你在日常生活中注意到的事情——你的观察、人们的行为、态度，以及任何小小的变化迹象。

### 7. Upload or Stick Pictures of People Engaged in Your Event/Activity!

上传或粘贴参与活动的照片！



## Annual Reflection & Impact | 年度反思与影响

Purpose | 目的:

Reflect on your progress and future goals.

回顾这一年的进展，并思考未来的目标。

- This year we focused on 今年我们主要关注:

- We observed these changes in our community 我们在社区中观察到的变化:

- Next year, we hope to 明年我们希望能:

End

结语

**Every note you write, every story you record, and every voice you keep alive becomes part of your community's living memory.**  
你记录的每一条笔记、每一个故事，以及你守护的每一份声音，都会成为社区共同的活态记忆。

**Language revitalization is not only about saving words — it's about nurturing connections, pride, and belonging.**  
语言复兴不仅是保护词语本身——更是培育人与人之间的连接、文化的自豪感，以及身份归属感。

**Keep celebrating each small step.**  
请继续庆祝每一个微小的进步。

**Together, these moments grow into a movement that keeps your language — and its spirit — alive for generations to come.**  
这些片刻汇聚在一起，将形成一股力量，让你的语言——以及它的精神——在世代传承中持续鲜活。

# Nisu Yi Language Festival Implementation Guide

## Nisu Yi Language Festival Implementation Guide

- Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre
- Yongning & Renhou Village Committee
- Guanlan Subdistrict Administration



### Before You Begin

This handbook provides references and suggestions for village committees and community learning halls when organizing a Yi Language Celebration. It covers preparation, organization processes, and key considerations, aiming to support the transmission and promotion of mother tongue culture.

It should be noted that this is not a fixed model but a flexible guide. Every village has different conditions, resources, and participant groups. Activities should always be adapted to local needs.

We sincerely welcome you to enrich and refine the celebration with your own experiences and creativity. This handbook serves not only as a practical tool, but also as a starting point for us to safeguard our mother tongue and strengthen our community together.

## Why Do We Need the Yi Language Celebration?

Language is the root of culture, the vessel of collective memory and identity.

Today, minority languages around the world are disappearing at an alarming pace, and China is no exception. With the pressures of social change, education, and work environments, many minority mother tongues are gradually fading from daily life. In Yongning and Renhou villages, the Yi language is relatively well preserved, yet still under threat of generational discontinuity. Many in their 30s and 40s already struggle to speak fluently, while the younger generation has even fewer chances to learn. Without proactive measures for protection and transmission, the loss of language will be inevitable.

The Yi Language Celebration is therefore more than an opportunity to learn and practice—it is an important action to sustain cultural roots and inspire community pride. Through collective effort, we hope to bring people closer to their mother tongue once again, ensuring the Yi language remains alive and vibrant in contemporary life.

## 01 For NYECC

### Workshop Ideas

The following activity ideas come from co-creation with Renhou Culture Centre and the village committees. They are provided here as inspiration:

- Yi culture knowledge quiz for children
- Traditional Yi language guessing games
- Yi folktale sharing session
- Yi tongue twisters
- On-site teaching of Yi songs
- On-site teaching of simple Yi expressions
- Childhood games combined with the Yi language
- Sharing Yi idioms and sayings
- Yi song duets

If you come up with new ideas, please keep it into *Language Revitalization Workshop Archive*.

### Workshop Design

#### Step 1: Brainstorming Your Ideas

From the reference list above, choose the 2-3 you are interested in. Or you can also suggest your own ideas.

#### Step 2: Select the Final Idea

Pick three activities you would like to host, then rank them by priority.

Draw an axis chart on your paper to help decide which one is easiest to carry out and most connected to language.



### Step 3: Identify participants & gather resources

- Who is the main audience? Children, adults, or all ages?
- Review existing Culture Centre resources: which are suitable for the different age participants.



### Step 4: Record Requirements For Coordination With The Village Committee

- Will you need printed materials? About how many copies?
- Equipment checklist:
  - a. Microphones (Qty: )
  - b. Speaker system
  - c. Chairs (Approx. )
  - d. Tables (Qty: )
  - e. Pens (Qty: )
  - f. Others ()
- For interactive events: What small prizes will be given? About how many?
- For competitions: What gift packs will be prepared for 1st, 2nd, 3rd places? How many certificates need printing?

### Step 5: Facilitating tips

- Remember that both villagers and visitors may attend; some may not speak Yi.
- Repeat Yi words several times and explain the meaning in Chinese.
- Encourage everyone to speak aloud.
- Arrange for fluent speakers and non-speakers to sit together, helping each other.

## ■ Sample Agenda

- **9:00 - 9:10**  
Self-introduction, host intro & welcome
- **9:10 - 9:15**  
Introduce the value of the Yi Language Celebration
- **9:15 - 9:20**  
Activities introduction

- **9:20 - 10:40**  
Main activities (singing, guessing games, storytelling, etc.)
- **optional**  
Competition round (scoring/ judge's discussion)
- **10:40 - 10:50**  
award ceremony
- **10:50 - 11:00**  
Thanks & Group Photo



### Tips:

- The "main activities" can be freely combined (e.g., singing + guessing, or stories + games).
- Keep the total duration around 2 hours to avoid fatigue.

## ■ Reflection & Public on Wechat Official Account

Within one week after the celebration, meet with village committee staff to summarize the event, reflect on lessons learned, and plan improvements for the next Yi Language Celebration.

## 02 Village Committee Organization Guide



### ■ Village Committee Collaboration

The Celebration will be supported mainly by Yongning Village Committee, with Renhou Village Committee providing support. Yongning has more experience and is suitable for overall coordination.

### ■ Division of Roles (adjustable as needed):

#### 1. Organization & Coordination (1 person)

- Coordinate with the Culture Centre and internal team.
- Ensure all preparations are completed before the Celebration for smooth execution. (See the Pre-Event Checklist below)
- Within one week after the Celebration, hold a review meeting to reflect on shortcomings and strengths that should be maintained.

#### Pre-Event Checklist

1. Venue & Materials Team (name of members: \_\_, \_\_, \_\_)
  - Work with the Culture Centre to confirm necessary materials, equipment, and prizes.
  - Confirm the Venue
  - Prepare location signage
  - Print banners
2. Village Promotion (name of member: \_\_)
  - Print and post posters
  - Share event information in WeChat Moments and village WeChat groups to invite villagers to participate
3. Logistics Support (name: \_\_, \_\_, \_\_, \_\_)
  - Arrange the venue (banners, electronic equipment setup, chairs, tables, etc.)
  - Take photos and record videos

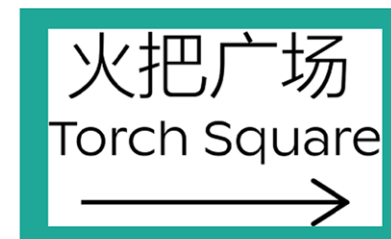
#### 2. Venue & Materials (2–3 people)

Before the event, coordinate with the Culture Centre and assist in preparing necessary items. Reference questions include:

- Do we need to print handouts? Approximately how many copies?
- What equipment is required?
- What prizes should be purchased?
- Should certificates be printed? How many copies?

#### Venue Confirmation & Guidance:

- Decide on the most suitable location at Yongning Village Torch Festival Square.
- Print or handwritten directional signage (see diagram below). Post the signage in the village one day before the Celebration to guide villagers and visitors.



#### 3. Village Promotion (1 person)

Notify villagers from both Yongning and Renhou to attend the Yi Language Celebration.

Possible methods:

- Post posters in crowded places such as pavilions or village entrances.
- Share posters on WeChat Moments.
- Share event information in village WeChat groups.

Example message:

Dear villagers: On [Month Day], from 9:00–11:00 am, we will hold the Yi Language Celebration at Torch Festival Square. Everyone is welcome to come speak Yi language and sing Yi songs! Don't forget to bring your children and join the fun!

#### 4. On-day Activity Support (3–4 people)

- Arrange the venue (banners, chairs, equipment setup, etc.).
- Assist the host with awarding prizes, distributing water, and handing out gifts.
- Take photos and keep records.

# Degree show

## *Lyrics From Nisu Yi Community*

Located in Yongning & Renhou  
Village, Yunnan, China



Photo by Guantao Yi

**ual:** london college  
of communication

### What to Eat in a Year Bajun Li

*What do we eat in a year?  
In a year, there's something to eat every month.*

*On the sixteenth day of the first month,  
Aunties and grannies come back from New Year visits —  
there's meat to eat, and rice cakes to eat.*

*In February and March,  
we eat fresh green vegetables.*

*In April, we eat mulberries.  
In May, we eat hard peaches.  
In June, we eat duoyi fruit.  
In July, we eat watermelons.*

*In August, we eat peanuts and flatbreads.  
In September, we eat olives.  
In October, we eat tomatoes.*

*In November and December,  
there are weddings and celebrations —  
there's food to eat, and drinks to share.*



Scan me to  
explore  
more sounds

Scan this QR code to explore more voices

# Degree show



## Degree show - Story with Nisu Yi Community

# In the Nisu Yi Community Yunnan, China

Guantao Yi  
MA Service Design24-25

*“We almost forget  
our language. Why  
do you still care  
about it?”*

— From an auntie in Yongning Village

### We almost forget — and start to remember again

Two aunties joined my interview, but at the same time, they had some questions. They said their language is no longer important — everyone now needs to go out for study and work, and the language is not useful anymore. So they asked me.

I kept silent for a while. I know how important language is to our sense of identity, but if I had always lived there, maybe I would think the same way. It was only after I went abroad to study and lived far from home that I began to feel the urge to understand the roots of my own culture.

But culture and language should not drift apart — we need to embrace them while they are still around us.

01





*Nisu Yi grandma was turning on her music speaker and wanted to show us her singing*

### Passionate about singing in Nisu Yi

When I first arrived in Yongning Village, I met a Nisu Yi grandma sitting by the roadside. She waved to me warmly and invited me to her home to rest. She told me that her favorite thing to do was sitting in front of her home, chatting with the younger generation and singing together.



*"Weekly Yi Songs" Workshop on every Saturday Evening at Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre*

### Community-based Language Revitalization Organization

Pu is one of the organizers at the Nisu Yi Ethnic Culture Centre. Together with his wife, Li, they have been facilitating all the workshops related to the Nisu Yi language here for the past seven years. More than just language teaching, this place helps the community recognise their cultural heritage, brings people together, and strengthens their confidence in their mother tongue.

In this photo, Pu was teaching a traditional Huadeng drama song in Nisu Yi. His voice couldn't reach the high notes, and the villagers burst into laughter.

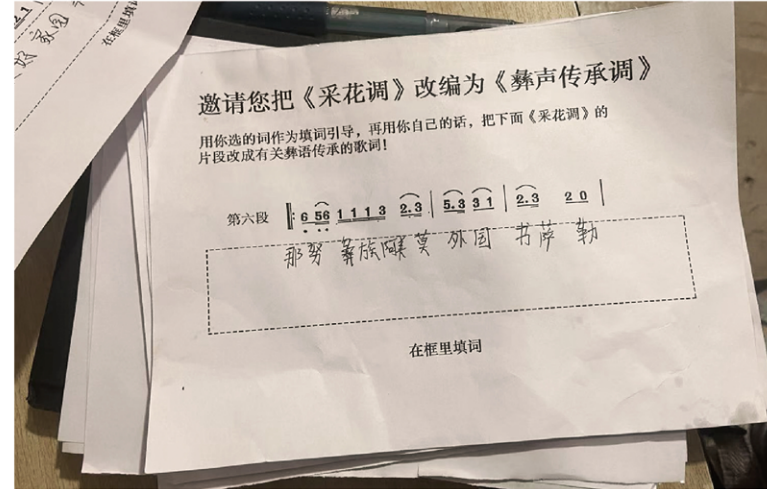


Using the traditional and local riddles to prototype with villagers

### Design should be rooted in their life, culture, and knowledge

Before this prototype, I had tried several ways to involve villagers in my design, but I could feel that my earlier approaches somehow isolated them. They were not familiar with the methods I brought in. Through those moments, I realised that the villagers are the true knowledge holders of their land. They know when their crops will mature, what pea blossoms look like, and they have created many stories and songs in their own language.

So in the final prototype, I used local riddles and songs recorded by the culture centre to create language-based interactions with them. They participated enthusiastically — discussing together and even teaching me how to speak Nisu Yi.



A villager wrote me a short message on our co-creation template

### More than co-designing, it's a connection

I invited participants to co-create a community song together, using the music sheet we had been learning from. One auntie wrote me a short message in Nisu Yi language. Since Nisu Yi is oral and has no writing system, she used Chinese characters to represent the pronunciation:

"na nu yip cup ap mai mop, wait gop su sat lepi"  
 ("You are a Nisu Yi girl who went abroad to study!")

In that moment, I realised that trust had already grown between us — a quiet connection built through our time and songs together.



Thank you.