

# Preserving Craft, Sharing Voice

## -- Yannan Li

### 1. Context & Goals

I worked with the feminist NGO SheStays in Dali, Yunnan, to support the preservation and celebration of indigenous women's cultural practices, especially within the Bai and Mosuo communities.

My focus was on traditional crafts such as tie-dye, incense plates, 瓦猫 (clay guardian cats), and 甲马 (paper talismans). These are not only creative expressions but also carry deep ecological, ritual, and philosophical meanings.

The goal was to de-commercialise these crafts and foster wider appreciation for their cultural significance, beyond tourism or aesthetic trends.



A Mosuo wedding



Workshop from Mosuo artisans to make traditional hair accessories



### 2. Activities

- Organised craft workshops with local Bai and Mosuo artists
  - Included incense plate carving, tie-dye, 瓦猫, and 甲马
  - Artists shared both techniques and cultural/philosophical meanings
- Co-organised book clubs and storytelling events
  - Women from different generations shared life stories
  - Created inclusive and empathetic spaces for dialogue



### 3. Reflections & Challenges

This project taught me that ethical leadership begins with listening, not directing.

I often struggled with how to support the community without appearing to 'speak for' or 'save' them. The line between help and harm is thin when working with cultural heritage.

Leadership in this context meant creating space for others to lead — especially those whose voices are often unheard. It also meant stepping back, being reflexive, and learning from discomfort.



A 甲马(Wood print) workshop



Visit to 瓦猫(Cl原因 cat) museum

Book clubs meeting

