“Yi” Handicraft Project: Creating Societal Support and Infrastructure by Preserving Minority Cultural Heritage in China

China
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Organization type: for profit
Budget: $500,000 - $1 million
Website: http://english.youcheng.org/

• Citizen participation
• Cultural preservation
• Conscious consumerism
• Design
• Economic development
• Rural development
• Women’s issues

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

While economic opportunities are concentrated in China’s coastal areas, development lags in inland provinces, especially among ethnic minority groups. The lack of employment opportunities forces ethnic minorities to leave their communities to seek jobs. The dwindling population poses serious threats to both the livelihood of those left behind, especially women, and preservation of a rich set of ethnic cultural practices.

The “Yi” project plays a critical role in promoting fundamental changes in community rebuilding, cultural preservation, and job creation for minority women. The ethnic cultures and historical heritage preserved through efforts such as the “Yi” project are critical to the integrity of ethnic structure and cultural diversity of the world.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

The conditions of the target beneficiaries (rural, minority women) are harsh. These women’s family members (husband and older children) often leave the home to become migrant workers, due to better economic opportunity in cities. Thus, rural women are often faced with the burden of providing agricultural production, supporting the elderly, raising children. Additionally, they generally have a low education level, low income levels, poor quality of life, low self-confidence, and psychological burdens.

While the Yi Handicraft project eventually hopes to preserve the cultural heritage of a number of ethnic minorities, Pu’er, a small city in southeast Yunnan province, has been chosen as a potential pilot community. The Pu’er region is home to the Yi, Hani, Dai, Lahu, and Va ethnic minorities; their handicraft heritage includes the Yi traditional dress, bamboo basket weaving, Hani Traditional apparel, dragon boat crafts, Dai traditional pottery, Dai handmade paper, diamond embroidery and cross-stitching. Team members have traveled to Pu’er to identify “Inheritors of Local Handicrafts,” those individuals who are responsible for maintaining and preserving local handicraft designs. Our team has also met with local government officials, who have expressed enthusiasm in the cultural preservation project.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

One innovative area is the creation of an infrastructure that incorporates public advocacy, a marketable branding mechanism and a sustainable distribution channel. While handicraft programs have been successful elsewhere, similar programs in China lack the support of a sustainable value chain and infrastructure network. PuCheng’s access to government, NGO, and for-profit resources is critical to helping small-scale entities create a scalable branding, training, distribution, and marketing initiative. For example, like the “Fair Trade” initiative, our “Yi” branding mechanism will guarantee consumers of the quality, legitimacy, and social impact of the handicraft products: “Yi” Art: Combination of traditional handicraft and modern design “Yi” Benefit: Public sector innovation and social enterprise implementation “Yi” Recollection: Inheritance of traditional art and culture PuCheng is in discussion with China’s Ministry of Culture and industry leaders to establish the “Yi” brand. “Yi” will be a legitimate, well-recognized brand that will transform these products from overlooked and under-purchased to associated with modernity, public good, and cultural preservation. Our ultimate goal is to work with existing handicraft programs through an integrated resource platform and value chain that will: •Conduct workshops and training session in rural areas •Collaborate with renowned designers for product development, design, and quality control of traditional handicraft industry •Distribute products at retail stores

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.
Until recently, NGOs faced many restrictions within China; the social sector has only begun to blossom, and there is a need for a capacity building, communication, and coordination mechanism. Utilizing domestic and international expertise, PuCheng will coordinate resources across sectors to promote cultural inheritance (Cultural Strengthening), rural poverty alleviation (Economic Development), and community development (Community Building). We will develop a fund and platform to optimize the efficiency of cross-sector players by providing: •Ongoing financial support •Government assistance - Local governments in China play a critical role in driving initiatives by collaborating with local NGOs and other partners. •Distribution channel for services/products •Marketing, public advocacy and impact on policy making

We will accomplish this via:

1. Policy leadership – In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, we will dedicate a fund to cultural preservation, providing centralized support to activities within the platform.
2. Branding: The Yi Brand (Detailed in the “Innovation” Section) will merge concepts of art, public good, and culture.
3. Research: Scholars will document handicrafts’ history and culture, using them as tools for public advocacy.
4. Public Advocacy: Conferences, documentaries, exhibitions, and the “Yi” brand will raise awareness of the importance of cultural preservation and diversity.
5. Cross-Sector Collaboration to Build the Handicraft Industry: We will build a value chain that integrates government, academic, social sector, and private sector resources.

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**Social Impact**

**Please describe how your project has been successful and how that success is measured**

Initial success has been demonstrated by the:
1. Formation of a brand strategy and partnership with Oglivy
2. Research and local government meetings conducted at Pu’er
3. Communication with experts at Tsinghua University to contribute research to via the Tsinghua-YouChange Research Center For Social Innovation
4. Identification of potential partners, including BNC (Brand New China), Shang-xia, and La Vie, China Eastern Airlines’, Arts and Crafts Academy and Central Academy of Fine Arts to establish a fund, implement pilot, and redesign product.
In the future, the metrics below can mark the success of the project. Before our initial pilot at Pu’er, we plan to do a baseline study to assess needs and gather initial benchmark levels of the individual and community level indicators below, collecting data via interviews, focus groups, observations, existing statistical information, and survey of individual beneficiaries and community leaders.

Indicator Categories

Benchmarks

Individual Beneficiaries
• % Income Increase
• Gender Awareness
• Leadership Ability and Confidence
• Capacity Building (Training Courses): Trainee Evaluation

Community-Level
• # Employed
• Sense of Community
• # People Returning to Village
• Economic Impact on Community
• Perception of Women’s Role

Grassroot organizations
• Productivity
• % Sales Increase
• Cost Savings
• # Handicraftsmen Trained
• Employment

Society
• # Cultural Heritage Items Preserved
• Brand Awareness and Trust
• Public Awareness (Number Educated)

Retail and Distribution
• Profitability
• Product Popularity
• Sales

PuCheng Internal
• Cost Recovery
• Funding

How many people have been impacted by your project?

How many people could be impacted by your project in the next three years?

101-1,000

How will your project evolve over the next three years?

The goal of the program is to develop a replicable model for cross-sector collaboration and improve infrastructure for social entrepreneurs. We will pilot the model in one to two communities in 2012. PuCheng is also working with the Ministry of Culture to create a Cultural Heritage Fund to support such initiatives through policy-making and funding support.

From 2012-2017, PuCheng expects to replicate the pilot by training up to 1000 “Inheritors of Local Handicrafts” in minority communities and creating 100 community based programs. PuCheng hopes to utilize the recently formed partnership with Tsinghua University, the most prestigious university in China, to fund 10 research projects and publications in the next 3 years to document and archive success stories.

Sustainability

What barriers might hinder the success of your project and how do you plan to overcome them?

Currently the markets fail to realize the economic and cultural opportunity that these handicrafts present, primarily due to a disconnection between different players across sectors. By bringing together players across sectors through funding, seminars, and conferences, we will build the industry value chain to create economic opportunity for rural women.

Hence, it is important to acknowledge that many of the ethnic minorities possess valuable cultural heritage with very different profiles and traits. The PRC has recognized 55 Ethnic minorities, each with unique cultures and languages. Thus, efforts must be put into place to ensure that all parties involved including the inheritors, local NGOs, local government and designers on the platform will have a full understanding of the culture that they are training and helping.

We believe in the originality and scalability of the proposed platform in China, an important step is to make the solution validated, understood and accepted, creating the basis for being a new valid economic system for addressing societal challenges at macro level. PuCheng will present this project in TEDxBeijing as well as other international conferences. Changemakers can help bring visibility to the project to gain national and international reach, as well as attract potential partners around the world.

Tell us about your partnerships

We have one official partner and many partnerships to be announced at our July forum:

1. Branding
Ogilvy, our current partner, has provided key branding and marketing strategy guidance. We will continue to collaborate with Ogilvy, who will oversee the branding strategy implementation by a public relations agency, Motto.

2. Redesign and Training
We will cooperate with top designers BNC (Brand New China), La Vie, and Shang-xia (Hermes’ brand inspired by Chinese culture) to redesign traditional cultural products and assist in training program development. We have drafted an MOU, and the partnership will be official in July 2011.

3. Local Cooperation
Meetings with local Pu’er government officials helped us understand local cultural heritage laws. Because they are receptive to this project, local
officials will aid in coordinating surveys and the search for local handicrafts.

4. Distribution
China Eastern Airlines has agreed to distribute products in their duty-free selection, and our kick-off ceremony will be held in July 2011.

5. Public Advocacy
To broaden public understanding of intangible cultural heritage, we will produce videos, documentaries, and art exhibitions; to accomplish this we have partnered with TEDx and will potentially partner with Beijing Arts and Crafts Academy and Central Academy of Fine Arts to develop a “Design for China” student competition.

6. Research
We will partner with Tsinghua to promote intangible cultural heritage research, preserving the traditional culture's community, national history, and living habits while adding experts' professional perspective.

**Explain your selections**

China Social Entrepreneur Foundation (YouChange Foundation) has funded the project. YouChange is a non-profit charitable organization funded by entrepreneurs from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. YouChange has two missions:
- To identify and support leaders in new philanthropy: the use of business knowledge, research, and funds to strategically promote development and aid poverty-relief projects.
- To establish cross-sector cooperation networks, platforms, and support for the sustainable development of poverty-stricken communities by promoting innovation in resources and delivery channels via:
  - Strategic Incubation of Institutions with a Key Role in the Industry
  - Deployment of Financial, Human, and Social Capital to Strengthen the Sector
  - Establishment of Efficient Project Management and Financial Management Systems

Additionally, in December 2010, PuCheng organized a Gala Dinner, attended by our partners and YouChange's board members, to raise funds.

**How do you plan to strengthen your project in the next three years?**

In the upcoming years, we will provide an integrated platform by expanding on programs in:

1) Living Inheritance: To support an industry value chain of designers, manufacturers, brand managers, and distribution channels, specifically:
   - Identify inheritors of valuable, marketable cultural heritage
   - Conducting a baseline study on target beneficiaries to understand community context
   - Enabling stylists to collect local handicraft styles and combine them with current fashion elements to create a new design
   - Training local women to make products according to the design
   - Selling finished product to high end markets, gift-shops, and cooperatives
   - Reinvesting part of sales and financial support in training and manufacture

2) Product Protection: To associate platform activities with a legitimate brand, by executing the branding strategy developed by Ogilvy and bringing together key designers and retail centers.

3) Community Repair: To explore appropriate models aimed at promoting rural culture and community building and improving local villagers’ abilities, self-confidence, communication, and cooperation.

4) Public Advocacy: To engage the public in the concept of intangible cultural heritage through scholarships, seminars, exhibitions, documentaries, and investment in new programs; to support policy research through partnership with Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy and Social Sciences.

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**Challenges**

Which barriers to employment does your innovation address?
Please select up to three in order of relevancy to your project.

**PRIMARY**

Lack of access to information and networks

**SECONDARY**

Lack of skills/training

**TERTIARY**

Restricted access to new markets

Please describe how your innovation specifically tackles the barriers listed above.

Issues include:
- Lack of knowledge regarding the value of these handicrafts
- Barrier in promoting handicrafts to wealthier coastal regions of China, where consumers prefer modern designs
- Grassroots NGOs’ lack of efficient distribution channels

We will solve these issues using professional designers and a branding initiative, providing rural women with economic opportunity while preserving traditional Chinese artistry. We will overcome each barrier by:
- Training: Designers will modernize products and instruct women on production.
- Rebranding: Ogilvy has helped develop the “Yi” branding strategy, essential to targeting upper class, cosmopolitan urban residents.
- Distribution: We will add distributors and retailers to our platform, such as China Eastern Airlines.

Are you trying to scale your organization or initiative?
If yes, please check up to three potential pathways in order of relevancy to you.

**PRIMARY**

**SECONDARY**
Influenced other organizations and institutions through the spread of best practices

TERTIARY

Repurposed your model for other sectors/development needs

Please describe which of your growth activities are current or planned for the immediate future.

We will communicate the success of the Pu’er pilot in November in order to gain access to additional partnerships as well as sites for training and manufacture of additional handicraft partnerships. Specific next steps include:

• Student design competition
• Engagement of design firms in the development of products
• Project launching ceremony and seminar in July
• TEDx event in September
• Culture Heritage Exhibition in October

Do you collaborate with any of the following: (Check all that apply)

For profit companies.

If yes, how have these collaborations helped your innovation to succeed?

To date, we have secured partnership with Ogilvy in China to assist in marketing and branding: Ogilvy has helped us to develop a product redesign and branding strategy, which will be essential to targeting the upper class, cosmopolitan urban residents in Eastern provinces who might otherwise reject the design as rustic or unrefined.

Other areas of future success include: collaboration with BNC (Brand New China), Shang-xia, and La Vie on Redesign and training, Local Cooperation with the Pu’er Government, Distribution via China Eastern Airlines’ duty free shops, Publicity via a TEDx event and student design competitions at Beijing Arts and Crafts Academy and Central Academy of Fine Arts, and research with Tsinghua University and The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

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