Everyday information practices of ethnic minorities with small populations in Yunnan, China

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the everyday information practices of ethnic minorities with small populations (EMSP) to identify the conditions that affect their information practices within the context of Chinese culture. A qualitative study was conducted with China's ethnic minorities, and data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving 45 participants. The data were statistically analyzed and processed using three levels of qualitative data coding analysis to identify the conditions that affect their everyday information practices. Findings show that the information needs of EMSP in China are relatively centralized, their sources of information acquisition are relatively fixed, and they do not cross ethnic group boundaries to share information with the outside world. In addition, traditions, customs, lifestyle, and ethnic identity are the conditions that influenced their everyday information practices. These results further the understanding of ethnic characteristics and traditional culture as conditions that can influence everyday information practices.

Keywords: Ethnic minorities; Small populations; Everyday information practice; Information needs; Information behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Information technologies and theoretical guidance both play important roles in social inclusion and integration for marginalized and minority populations in modern society. Interdisciplinary researchers from library and information science (LIS), sociology, and communication have been investigating how information-seeking, distribution, and use can offset the digital divide and exclusion of underserved and marginalized social groups. Studies indicate that marginalized populations such as minorities, migrant farmers, immigrants, and the homeless may have difficulties integrating into information societies (Dankasa 2017; Du and Haines 2017; Gordon, Gordon and Door 2003; Jin and Liang 2015).

This paper addresses the everyday information practices of ethnic minorities in China. Webster's Dictionary defines a minority as "a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment." The concept of minority may vary in different cultural contexts. China is a multi-ethnic country with one majority (the Hans) and 55 minorities. Minority populations in China include both indigenous populations as well as people who immigrated from other geographic regions. Their average education levels and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills are significantly lower than the national average, and most of the populations have language and reading barriers that have prevented them from accessing modern information technology and devices (Fu, Zuo and Lenihan 2011).

Among the Ethnic Minorities in China, there is a special classification called the Ethnic Minorities with Small Populations (EMSP). These ethnic minority populations include both indigenous populations as well as migrants from other regions. Ethnic populations below 300,000 (small populations) account for a total population of approximately 1.9 million, nearly 0.1 percent of the total Chinese population. Most EMSP groups live in isolated environments and maintain a relatively independent culture which may generally constrain their exchange of information with the outside world. At the same time, due to the low level of social development, many ethnic groups along with their language and culture are in danger of gradually disappearing (China State Council 2017). In order to facilitate an exchange of information between these minorities and the outside world and to advance their development, it is important to first understand their everyday information practices.

Everyday information practices are considered habitual and context-embedded and are often influenced by social and cultural factors (Savolainen 2008). For example, the culture and characteristics of an ethnic minority may influence their information needs and behaviour. Incorporating information practices is an information search behaviour that occurs in the community, involves complicated situational factors and individual factors, and is an important aspect of information practices (Jette 2009). In the research of cooperative information search behaviour, scholars have investigated the differences between cooperative information search behaviour and personal information search behaviour processes, and believe that there are many differences between them, including the manner of interaction between people, the complexity of information demand, and the role of information technology (Madhu and Bernard 2008; Sonnenwald and Pierce 2000)

EMSP communities suffer from slow economic development and many, loss of language and culture. To explore the context of ethnic culture and tradition as a condition that can influence information practices may present a unique perspective in the research of information practices among various cultures and ethnic groups. In addition, understanding unique ethnic characteristics and traditions may also help government agencies, foundations, and social organizations to effectively identify obstacles and challenges EMSPs face in their daily lives. Thus far, public interest in ethnic minorities has been greatest with regard to technical innovation and information infrastructure investment. However, despite the growing research exploring the information practices of ethnic minorities (Cibangu 2019; Dlamini and Ocholla 2018; Du and Haines 2017; Jin and Liang 2015; Larson and Lewis 2017; Lilley 2012; Lupien and Chiriboga 2019; Meyer 2009), to date, a study of the everyday information practices in a Chinese context is yet to be undertaken. There are no existing studies that explore how ethnic minorities in Chinese culture view what information is important to them, and what conditions influence the choices they make on how they seek, use, and handle information.

As a first step to understanding these marginalized groups and aiding the preservation of cultural integrity, this paper addresses the following research questions:
    (a) What types of information do EMSPs need in daily life?
    (b) How do EMSPs acquire information sources?
    (c) How do EMSPs share information?
    (d) What are the conditions that affect EMSP's everyday information practices?
To answer the research questions above, the authors must investigate EMSPs' everyday information practices. An in-depth investigation may help to further expand the study of the information behaviour of ethnic minorities in cross-cultural contexts. In addition, the results of this study may help government and funding agencies and social organizations to effectively identify the conditions that may influence EMSPs information practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context of Everyday Information Practices

Human information behaviour is a deliberate and purposeful means of satisfying information needs. This is supported by various theories such as the theory of information behaviour (Wilson 1977), and sense-making methodology (Dervin 1998), and models such as the framework for information seeking processes (Kuhlthau 1991). At the same time, numerous attempts have been made to characterize the different contexts by which information is sought, such as "social roles, tasks, and identities" (Case 2017, p. 47).

Courtright (2007) provided a recent overview that explained the importance of situation, time, geography, culture, and other contextual elements in shaping individual experiences of information practices. There are many varied behaviours and contexts that shape how people seek and use information in their everyday lives, and in some cases, specific contexts are employed. For instance, information use of the environment consists of four types: Professions, entrepreneurs, special interest groups, and socioeconomic groups. (Cool 2001). From the perspective of the present study, the context also includes concepts such as a small world (Chatman 1999) and information grounds (Fisher and Naumer 2006).

As human information behaviour is not completely rational or uniform and is shaped by various social contexts, such conceptualizations draw on the assumption that context is a kind of a time-space "container" where phenomena reside and activities take place, constrained by the boundaries of the context (Savolainen 2009). The container model leads to the concept that contextual factors describing the situation can influence the information practices of certain groups and societies, which are embedded in the actions, tasks, and situations of their participants.

Traditionally, context is conceptualized in terms of spatial and temporal factors that indicate how and why information behaviour occurs in one's everyday life practice. Everyday information practices may be defined as an umbrella concept that delineates the ways in which people seek, use, and share information in their everyday life contexts. (Savolainen 2008). This study applies Savolainen's everyday information practices as a conceptual tool to understand ethnic minorities' information needs, acquisition, and sharing.

Information Practice Research on Ethnic Minorities

For ethnic minorities, the context may be their living or work environment. For example, Du and Haines (2017) found that ethnic minorities in Australia tend to seek information about the weather, traditions, and work; their information practice is affected by their geographical conditions and oral traditions. Socioeconomic issues, such as poverty, a lack of resources, low education levels and limited language skills, can also influence minorities' information practices. Low levels of education and poor economic development mean that the information needs of ethnic minorities in China are closely related to their everyday lives, such as information on agriculture and the climate. The acquisition of the information is significantly influenced by their own language and culture (Jin and Liang 2015).

Additionally, most ICT research describes digital gap and technology acceptance as important contexts that will influence the information practices of ethnic minorities (Cibangu 2019; Dlamini and Ocholla 2018; Lupien and Chiriboga 2019). Cibangu (2019) considers the ways in which ethnic minorities' exchange of information with the outside world is limited by a lack of access to information technology and social media. Lupien and

Chiriboga (2019) indicate that the impact of ICT on the lifestyle of ethnic minorities is far from what is being thought of - their acceptance of information technology largely depends on whether their living habits will be impacted by these technologies, rather than how these technologies will improve the level of their lives. Dlamini and Ocholla (2018) find that information technology can help to manage ethnic minorities' knowledge, however, most indigenous groups believe that information technology is not conducive to promoting the continuity of their traditional culture. In general, ethnic minorities living in remote areas of China will also face these problems (Liu 2012; Jin and Liang 2015.)

Furthermore, researchers have found that ethnic minorities' oral cultures (Larson and Lewis, 2017), values and beliefs (Meyer 2009), identities (Lilley 2008; 2012), and traditions and habits (Yeh 2007) may affect their everyday information practices. Larson and Lewis (2017) highlighted that rural Ugandan minorities with oral cultures find that the homogeneity makes it easier for them to spread information within their ethnic group. Meyer (2009) documented that oral culture within South African ethnic groups is controlled by their attitudes, perceptions, norms, values, and belief systems. Lilley (2008) relied upon his own sense of cultural identity to study ethnic minorities in New Zealand and observed that they encounter a wide range of barriers where information may be unavailable, incorrect, difficult to find or members may be unaware of the information they actually need. A follow-up study also found that the value of Māori secondary school students' ethical networks may affect their information needs (Lilley 2012). Yeh (2007) further emphasized that ethnic minorities' everyday information practices are influenced by their personal lifestyles, traditions, and prejudices, and also impact the way they fulfil their information needs. Generally speaking, ethnic minorities living in China have independent ethnic characters and cultures, and their daily information practices may relate to their unique ethnic characteristics and traditional culture.

In summary, previous studies have found that, in addition to economic poverty, living conditions, and the information technology they may encounter, the everyday information practices of minorities is closely related to their ethnic characteristics and traditional culture. On this basis, this paper further investigates the everyday information practices of EMSPs and their influencing conditions.

METHOD

This study was part of a project supported by the National Social Science Fund of China, which conducted research on the daily information practices, living conditions, and cultures of EMSPs. It employed a qualitative approach and research data were gathered firsthand through in-depth interviews and participatory observation.

Using the conceptual framework of how "everyday information practices" take place in the context of life developed by Savolainen (2008, p. 50), research data were collected and analyzed. Three major aspects of "everyday information practices" were revealed: identifying information sources, accessing information, and giving information to others.

Research Participants
Of the 56 ethnic groups in China, 28 groups belong to EMSP, and 8 of them are in Yunnan Province, which has the largest EMSP population in China. The minority ethnic groups include the Derung, Deang, Jino, Nu, Achang, Pumi, Blang, and Jingpo, with a total population of 450,000. Considering the convenience of data acquisition and the

representativeness of sample distribution, this research study chose two ethnic groups as research samples: the Blang and the Jino. The Blang live among villages located in the mountains of 2,000 m height, surrounded by tall cliffs. Many decisions are made by Blang elders. They have their own language which belongs to the South Asian Myanmar-Khmer language family. According to the 2010 Chinese National Census, there are 80,388 Blang living in Yunnan Province (CCOSC 2010).

Jino is an ancient minority living predominantly in Jino Township, surrounded by mountains in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Known for tea-planting, the Jino speak the Jino language, a sub-division of the Tibetan-Burman language family. With no writing system of their own, they preserved their culture and traditions through folklore, oral literature, and bamboo carving before 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded. There are 25,000 Jino living in Yunnan Province according to the 2010 Chinese Census (CCOSC 2010).

The samples for this research were the Jino (51.8%) and Blang (48.2%) ethnic groups living on Jinuo Mountain, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China. The distance from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, to Beijing, the capital of China, is 2,603 km. Xishuangbanna is approximtely 536 km southwest of Kunming, Yunnan Province. The township of Jinuoshan Township, which administers six villages, is approximtely 43 km from Jinghong City, Xishuangbanna Prefecture. The average distance between the 6 villages and Jinuoshan Township is about 77 kilometers.

Six villages (Lot Village, Situ Village, Baka Village, Bahui Village, Kunge Village, and Pushi Village) out of 11 villages where the two EMSP groups live were chosen. The six villages selected in this study all relied on tea and rubber-tree planting for their economy. The six villages are far from the township center, and there was no public infrastructure such as transportation, elementary or middle schools, libraries, hospitals, or shops. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of 45 participants. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 87 years old, comprising 44.4 percent males, and 55.6 percent females. A total of 56.4 percent understood Mandarin, the official Chinese language, and 34.7 percent were able to write in Chinese.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted into two stages: from July 8, 2018 to July 28, 2018. The first stage was used to select and familiarize the research team with the villages, and lasted for 5 days. During the second stage, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, which lasted for 15 days. Each interview session lasted for about 60–90 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted in the natural setting, i.e. the participants' homes, and the key interview questions included:

(a) What do you do in your daily life? What information do you need in your daily life? Can you describe your recent life?

(b) What methods and skills can you use in your daily life to get the information you want?

(c) Do you encounter any difficulties in your daily life? How do you usually solve these difficulties? What would you do if it could not be solved?

(d) Who do you often communicate and share your information with? How do you usually know what is going on outside?

(e) Can you tell me things about your ethnic minority culture? Has this culture ever influenced the way you look for information or how you share information from people?

All participants (coded P1-P45) gave consent to be interviewed. Where participants are not literate, verbal consent was obtained, and this was witnessed and recorded. In order to facilitate data collection and ensure research data were captured accurately, a few measures were taken. In the research process, some participants did not wish to be audio-recorded, although they consented to note-taking.

To establish trusting relationships, the research team stayed in the villages for 20 days, eating and staying with, as well as participating in the participants' daily activities. Each participant was given a small token of appreciation in the form of soap gifts before the interviews took place. A few of them could not understand or speak Mandarin; therefore, the researchers had to hire the locals who have basic fluency in both Mandarin and the local language as additional team members for the research. All interview recordings and observation notes were electronically converted for transcription. Each interview transcript was sent to the individual participants for review, for their feedback on the content and key aspects of the transcription, and to obtain their final approval on the transcript's accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is mainly accomplished through three levels of qualitative data coding analysis (Creswell 2014). The coding work for this study was undertaken by three people. Before coding commenced, the coders were trained on the overall work of the study. During this process, the researchers communicated with the coders to ensure that each coder understood the nature of the coding work.

The first level of coding was to create labels to categorize what the participants were saying. For example, the statement "*Because I can only see my daughter once a month, I sometimes call my daughter's head teacher to ask about her situation in school*" was labeled as "Education and training," information acquisition was labeled as "Use mobile phone," and the source of information sharing was labeled as "Teacher."

The second level of coding was used to outline some of the themes related to EMSPs everyday information practices from the data. For example, the statement "*We often have to prepare for some traditional rituals, and then we need to go to the patriarch to consult our genealogy, and ask if there will be any special requirements for the patriarch's rituals this year*" was specific context labelled as "traditional ritual," with the frequency of its occurrence in the text counted.

In the third level of coding, similar themes were combined into subcategories as a concept to explain the EMSPs everyday information practice. For example, according to the relationship between nodes, the nodes of "traditional ritual," "religious beliefs,""ethnic rules," and "ethnic knowledge" are all classified as "traditions and customs." Table 1 presents the themes of the second level coding and the subcategories of the third level of coding.

Table 1: Themes of the Second Level Coding and the Subcategories of the Third Level of Coding.

Themes of the second level coding	Subcategories of the third level of coding
"traditional ritual," "religious beliefs," "ethnic rules" and "ethnic knowledge"	traditions and customs
"regular behaviour," "traditional ideas," "life experience," and "cognitive model"	lifestyles
"emotional attachment," "self-confidence," "inner trust" and "familial value"	ethnic identity

FINDINGS

Everyday Life Description

EMSPs typically live in remote mountainous and border areas. Their economy mainly relies on tea planting and rubber harvesting, supplemented by poultry, livestock, farming, vegetable, and fruit trade. The transportation systems in EMSP areas are very under-developed and they are located far from the central towns. The residents rarely go to the nearest administrative village center. Usually, they rely on free automobile rides from relatives and friends to go out, and generally, they have to wait for one riding opportunity a year. They only go out to sell farm products, to send children to school, or to receive medical treatment. The schools are approximately 70 kilometers away from home, so their children start public boarding schools at the age of five. In many cases, they do not go out to see a doctor, unless the conditions are serious, and then they will go out to bigger towns or to a larger city to seek medical treatment. In addition, due to their remote location in the mountains, the mobile communication signals are weak and often interrupted.

In addition to farm work, daily life also includes traditional festival celebrations, customs, and religious activities. In addition to the festival celebrations, they often engage in fasting as a religious tradition; some individuals practice every day, while others practice once a week, and the grand fasting is held once a year. Some EMSP homes have installed satellite TV or own a radio as a means for recreation and entertainment. But for most of the time, after they are done with daily farming work, people gather to have tea, eat, drink, sing, dance, and hunt.

Everyday Information Practices of EMSPs

Most EMSPs harvest tea and rubber for their livelihood and produce their own food. They focus on work and traditional everyday activities, such as farming (68.89%), and tradition and religion (48.89%). Traditional and religious information includes festivals, worshipping, fasting customs, music, and dance. As EMSPs rely heavily on agriculture and forestry, information on weather accounted for a high percentage of their information needs (35.56%). This was followed by technical skills (26.67%), entertainment and news (20%), health and medical (15.56%), work-related (13.33 %), government policies (13.33%), education and training (11.11%), shopping and consuming (8.89%), laws (4.44%), and traffic and transportation (4.44%). Table 2 presents the information needs of EMSPs.

In EMSP villages, people live close to each other, and subsequently, they are heavily connected. With more opportunities to communicate face-to-face, most of their problems could be resolved within the village. Nearly three-quarters of EMSPs (73.33%) choose to meet their daily information needs by consulting face-to-face with others. When there are

important things that cannot be communicated face-to-face or need to be communicated with the outside world, ethnic minorities choose to use mobile phones (35.56%). Media consumption in EMSP villages is limited. Nonetheless, most EMSPs obtain current and mainstream information from radios and television programs. Despite linguistic and cultural barriers, some EMSPs watch satellite TV (28.89%) and listen to the radio (20%) for information. They also surf the Internet, on computer or mobile phone, to use social media and browse web sites (13.33), and read donated books, newspapers, and magazines (11.11%). Table 3 presents the information acquisition of EMSPs, i.e. the process through which they obtain information from internal and external sources.

Table 2: Information Needs of EMSPs

Information needs	Numbers of participants (n= 45)	Percentage
Farming	31	68.89%
Tradition and religion	22	48.89%
Weather	16	35.56%
Technical skills	12	26.67%
Entertainment and news	9	20.00%
Health and medical	7	15.56%
Work related	6	13.33%
Government policies	6	13.33%
Education and training	5	11.11%
Shopping and consuming	4	8.89%
Laws	2	4.44%
Traffic and transportation	2	4.44%

Table 3: Information Acquisition of EMSPs

Information acquisition	Numbers of participants (n=45)	Percentage
Consult or chat with people (face to face)	33	73.33%
Communicate through mobile phone	16	35.56%
Watch TV	13	28.89%
Listen to radio	9	20.00%
Surf the Internet (on computer or mobile phone)	7	15.56%
Read paper literature	5	11.11%

Information sharing among EMSPs, i.e. exchange of information between various organizations and people, predominantly occurred within villages where internal information exchange was frequent. These occurred predominantly within families. As shown in Table 4, most EMSP chose to share information with family members (88.89%) and relatives (71.11%). In addition, they emphasized that they communicate most information only with their own ethnic people (60%). EMSPs choose to communicate with their peers regarding daily information, such as their beliefs, religion, and cultural heritage. There is also external information exchange with government staff (17.78%), teachers (16.56%), doctors (8.89%), experts (6.67%), and business people (4.44%).

Table 4: Information Sharing of EMSPs

Information sharing	Numbers of participants (n= 45)	Percentage
Family members	40	88.89%
Relatives	32	71.11%
Similar ethnicities (friends, neighbors, etc.)	27	60.00%
Government staff	8	17.78%
Teachers	7	15.56%
Doctors	4	8.89%
Experts	3	6.67%
Business people	2	4.44%

Conditions that Affect EMSP's Everyday Information Practices

Interviews data highlighted three main conditions that could influence the everyday information practices of EMSPs: namely traditions and customs, lifestyle, and ethnic identity. Table 5 lists the specific reasons or conditions for EMSPs' everyday information practices in ranked order, with traditional rituals, ethnic knowledge, regular behaviours, life experience, inner trust, emotional attachment, and family value receiving more than 10 responses each.

Table 5: Conditions that Influence the Everyday Information Practices of EMSPs.

Main conditions	Specific reasons or conditions	Numbers of participants (n= 45)	Percentage
Traditions and customs	Traditional rituals	16	35.6%
	Ethnic knowledge	13	28.8%
	Ethnic rules	9	20.0%
	Religious beliefs	7	15.6%
Lifestyles	Regular behaviours	15	38.5%
	Life experience	11	28.2%
	Traditional ideas	8	20.5%
	Cognitive model	5	12.8%
Ethnic identity	Inner trust	26	35.7%
	Emotional attachment	22	30.1%
	Familial value	15	20.5%
	Self-confidence	10	13.7%

Traditions and customs refer to the beliefs and norms of EMSPs, which they gradually developed over a long period of time. Tradition and customs are established and generally understood through cumulative experiences and the inter-generational heritage of daily life. They are closely related to ethnic characteristics and serve as conscious and unconscious standards for activity. A group's rules and beliefs concerning daily life may limit their information needs, such as their worship of nature, respect for the elderly, and traditional management of the group. For example, participant P22 said: "*Here you need to judge a lot based on traditions and customs to see if they are accepted by the group, including sacrifices, traditional festival celebrations, weddings, and funerals. When I was very young, I was told that any recreational activity during sacrificial ceremonies was forbidden. At that time, young people were not allowed to watch TV, or even talk about topics unrelated to sacrificial activities, let alone use mobile phones.*"

Traditions and customs are manifested mainly in the traditional knowledge of EMSPs. Commonly, arcane knowledge is held in the memories of patriarchs or elders in ethnic groups; it is then sustained through oral heritage. The traditional and consistent knowledge systems of these groups may limit their selection of information sources. Traditional knowledge leads these groups to adopt a relatively traditional approach to their problems because they believe most solutions can be found only within the group. Thus, when these small groups seek information, their traditions and customs form the basic values they use and determine the information they need and what is not applicable. For example, participant P39 said: "*We hardly ever go to hospital because of their treatment methods; their techniques are contrary to our traditional ideas and knowledge. For example, the hospital encourages us to take medicine before childbirth and have scheduled check-ups, to help us give birth and raise healthy children. But for us, fertility is a natural process without human control and interference, and it is ridiculous to try and control the birth of a child. We have our own methods of birthing children and keeping them healthy, which have proven to be successful since our ancestors.*"

Lifestyle refers to the regular behaviour, cognitive models, and psychological characteristics developed by EMSPs through the course of their traditional daily lives. Their lifestyles tend to be traditional and simple because long-term isolation from the outside world engenders regularity and consistency. Lifestyle changes can challenge small ethnic groups, rendering it easy for them to pay little regard to changes in the outside world. Therefore, their scope of information needs, and their methods for acquiring information, are relatively concentrated. As a result, most of their information needs are influenced by their daily lives. For example, participant P17 said: "*Mostly, we go to bed early at night because there are basically no recreational activities, except for group festival celebrations or sacrificial activities. Every night we talk to our family or watch TV, and then go to bed. When we have free time during the day, we get together for a cup of tea with our clan members and talk about recent events in the clan, or we go to the mountains to collect medicine and hunt wild boars, and so on.*"

As knowledge is inherited within EMSPs, it accumulates to form relatively concrete lifestyles, which lead to habitually simple behaviours that immunize them from outside influences. Often, their way of life prevents EMSPs from fully understanding information from the outside world. They are more willing to trust in the intuition accumulated through daily life with the group and prefer simple information that can be easily understood, to complex and abstract topics. Their lifestyles make it easier for them to understand and accept information when it is generated internally. Therefore, their information needs may be better met by internal sources within their limited worlds. For example, participant P43 said: "*Some experts came to teach us how to grow tea. Although they know some important techniques, I do not think they understand the particularity of tea planting here. Their techniques are too complicated; we do not want to learn them. Most importantly, they do not understand the culture and tradition of tea planting in our ethnic group, and many of their technologies are contrary to our experience. For us, tea planting should rely on manual weeding and natural fertilizer, and not herbicides, and other chemical products.*"

Ethnic identity refers to an individual's beliefs, religion, and emotional attachment to a familial culture, and defines the characteristics of EMSPs. It involves the rituals and customs followed by the group, their interpersonal relationships, and other reliable resources within the group. A strong sense of identity and attachment to their own ethnic group constitutes their cultural self-confidence and inner trust. Given this, they may have difficulties communicating and cooperating effectively with people outside the group. Most

of them feel alienated from the outside world and are more likely to only trust information from within their group, and consequently, block the dissemination of information from the outside world. For example, participant P7 said: "*Our village is like a big family; we have few outsiders here, and very few of us go out. Several young people went outside to look for work a few years ago, and for a long time, we did not receive any messages from them. Later, people in the clan said that they had been arrested for taking part in drug trafficking along the border. For a long time, we have all felt that outside society is very complex, even dangerous. Although our material conditions are not as good as the outside world, we feel our life here is simple and peaceful, and we do not want something bad from outside to enter our group.*"

The kinship formed due to ethnic identity has convinced EMSPs that their cooperative networks are effective and trustworthy. Uncertainties they face during information practices are mitigated by their relationships developed through close contact, open communication, and a mutual sense of identity. Due to their ethnic identity, their self-identity becomes attached to the group's traditions and customs, and they doubt being understood and accepted by the outside world. Therefore, many EMSPs believe information practices from the outside world are impossible. For example, participant P28 said: "*We rarely talk to outsiders. I usually only talk to my husband, sometimes my daughter, and sometimes my relatives in the group, because outsiders do not understand our traditions and customs. For example, a Han woman from a nearby village came to visit her relatives. When she heard that we were discussing the idea of tattooing snakes on the arms of a new-born baby, she thought we were crazy, but we thought she was crazy. She did not respect our traditions, so I'm afraid we cannot build trust or communicate with outsiders.*"

DISCUSSION

This paper discusses the everyday information practices of ethnic minorities and influencing conditions within the context of Chinese culture. The information needs of EMSPs were relatively centralized and affected by their geographical location and environment. This was consistent with the conclusions of previous studies (Liu 2012; Jin and Liang 2015). The information needs of EMSPs were predominantly related to their geographical environment because they were more reliant on their natural environment and accumulated life experiences over a long period of time within the ethnic group. In general, the information they needed in their daily lives was based on their living environment and experience, so they sought more information on tea and rubber production, vegetable and fruit cultivation, poultry and livestock breeding, religious traditions, and climate and environment.

Due to the relatively fixed information demands of EMSPs, their channels, and sources for information acquisition were primarily regulated and affected by their living habits. This is consistent with the conclusions of previous studies (Du and Haines 2017; Yeh 2007). In this study, EMSPs habitually made use of interpersonal communication in their relatively sheltered information environment wherein they could obtain rich information from people within their group, which made them seldom acquire more information when solving current problems. At the same time, EMSPs abided by shared habits within their ethnic group, making it difficult for most sources of information acquisition to be considered.

In addition to geographical, economic, and educational factors, the ethnic characteristics of EMSPs significantly affected their information sharing. This was consistent with the conclusions of previous studies (Lilley 2012; Meyer 2009). EMSPs form particular ethnic characteristics throughout their life, which, in many cases, are difficult to change. Furthermore, their ethnic characteristics made them more inclined only to share information with people from the same ethnic background.

The findings of this study contribute to understanding why EMSPs choose to seek and share information from within their ethnic groups, rather than across ethnic boundaries. Living environment, oral tradition, and ethnic characteristics may affect the everyday information practices of EMSPs, thereby limiting their information needs (Du and Haines 2017; Jin and Liang 2015; Meyer 2009). This study found that EMSPs were more dependent on their common traditions and customs, and the cumulative lifestyles developed within their groups, further emphasizing how and why information behaviour occurs in one's everyday life practice (Savolainen 2008). Through their existing knowledge and experiences, they tended only to look for information that was understood and accepted by the group. For EMSPs, their ethnic identities may cause them to avoid information that contradicts their traditions, customs, and lifestyles. Consequently, EMSPs may avoid seeking and sharing information that may cause conflicts or damage to the internal beliefs and rules of their ethnic groups. This leads to the everyday information practices of EMSPs in some situations of information avoidance or selective filtering, or covert deception, reported in existing information behaviour research (Case 2017).

EMSPs frequently use interpersonal communication to meet their information needs (Du and Haines 2017; Larson and Lewis 2017; Meyer 2009). In this study, it was found that EMSPs had their own traditions and customs, and selected information resources and channels that were appropriate to their group's lifestyle. To some extent, methods to meet information needs beyond the group are likely to be useless for them, or, at least, unnecessary for the time being. The existing research on information behaviour shows that when faced with information sources that are inconsistent with their original social and cultural background and life style, individuals may feel it is difficult to refer to sources of information that may conflict with their existing ideas, as it can cause uncertainty in their behaviour (Williamson 1998). When EMSPs confront information sources that are inconsistent with their traditions, customs, and lifestyles, uncertainties regarding their understanding could arise. Before the uncertainty of EMSP regarding the external information and its relationship with the internal life of the ethnic group has been eliminated, it is difficult for them to actively contact the information sources that may conflict with their existing ideas, so as to further reduce the possibility of their contact with the external information sources.

For EMSPs, following their traditions and customs may result in prejudice against outside information (Lilley 2008; Yeh 2007). In this study, ethnic identity was highlighted among EMSPs, as they exhibited a strong affiliation to their traditions, customs, and lifestyles. Most participants stated that information from the outside world was unreliable because it contradicted their experiences; therefore, they were reluctant to accept it. In this case, EMSPs are usually reluctant to accept information from the outside world across ethnic groups in daily life. Information behaviour research suggests that the success of information resource acquisition depends largely on the position of the individual who owns these resources and the individual in the social structure (Mozafari and Hamzeh 2015). Therefore, the current social network may restrict the boundaries of everyday information practices of EMSPs; they may prefer to seek and share information from within

the group because they share similar backgrounds and tend to trust their own relationship networks which are closer to their own relatives and consanguinity within the ethnic group.

CONCLUSIONS

This study collected empirical data on different contextual elements regarding the everyday information practices of EMSPs. The findings of this study may present a unique perspective in the research of information practice among varying cultures and ethnic groups, and suggest that their traditions and customs, lifestyles, and ethnic identity are the main conditions that may influence everyday information practices. This leads to EMSPs' relatively centralized information needs, relatively fixed access to information, and seldom seeking of information from outside of their ethnic group. Hence, government agencies, foundations, libraries and other social organizations could then design information systems and services that respond to the unique ways that EMSPs function in order to help them strengthen their economic growth while also preserving their language and culture.

This study serves as the foundation for future research to re-examine the unique obstacles and severe challenges faced by marginalized ethnic groups, endangered cultures, forced migrants, and remote and rural communities, so they can be better integrated into a more equalized society. For cultures and communities with great ethnic diversity, this study opens a channel for further research on education access and training, information and communication technologies, and reduction of language barriers for better information exchange and social integration.

The limitations of this study were the relatively small sample size and the lack of a more in-depth analysis regarding the relationship between the contextual elements. This should be treated with care when generalizing the findings. Further research is necessary to explore information concerning the inheritance of these elements within the group; for example, how traditions and customs, lifestyle, and ethnic identity are established within a group, what behavioural patterns, cognitive models, and psychological characteristics are present, and how these elements gradually evolved into the information-seeking process of EMSPs. Further studies are also necessary to explore the reasons behind ethnic identity adherence among groups and how this persistence shapes their information needs.

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