

Traditional Knowledge Associated with Natural Lacquer Sap, Material Practices and Biocultural Heritage in China

Official educational resource prepared for Virtual Library Resource (VLR) submission to the Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearing-House (ABSCH)

Prepared by	World Intangible Cultural Heritage Federation (WICHF)
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Resource type	Communication materials; Learning materials; Presentation; Website-linked educational resource
Primary purpose	Awareness-raising, guidance and non-commercial learning
Coverage	China

This resource introduces traditional knowledge associated with natural lacquer sap in China, including the botanical source of raw lacquer, basic material properties, harvesting and processing practices, selected tools and craft techniques, and the relationship between lacquer practices and biocultural heritage. It is designed as an educational and awareness-raising resource for civil society organizations, researchers, cultural practitioners and the general public.

1. Resource overview

The resource focuses on natural lacquer sap as a plant-based material and on the body of traditional knowledge associated with its harvesting, preparation, handling and artistic application in China.

Its central aim is educational: to support introductory understanding of traditional knowledge associated with natural materials, and to encourage respectful documentation, community participation and fair and equitable benefit-sharing in contexts relevant to the Nagoya Protocol.

2. Natural lacquer sap and botanical source

Natural lacquer used in Chinese lacquer practices derives from the sap of lacquer trees. In the educational material curated for this resource, lacquer is presented first as a living plant-based material before it is discussed as a medium for craft and decorative practice.

This distinction is important. For ABSCH purposes, the resource is not framed as a general art catalogue. It is framed as a knowledge resource concerning plant-based material, associated traditional practices and the wider biocultural setting in which such practices are transmitted.

3. Distribution and producing regions in China

The source material describes lacquer tree distribution across several regions of China, with notable production concentrated in mountain areas where ecological conditions are suitable for growth.

This regional dimension helps explain why knowledge about lacquer sap is not only technical but also territorial. It is connected to specific landscapes, producing areas, ecological conditions and communities of practice.

4. Harvesting, filtering and processing knowledge

The educational material outlines how lacquer trees are tapped, how sap is collected over time, and why rest periods and careful harvesting practices matter. It also describes filtering and preparation steps before the material can be used.

These practices are part of the traditional knowledge chain. They involve judgement about timing, tree condition, climatic conditions, handling methods and material quality. Such knowledge is relevant because it sits at the interface between biological source material and cultural practice.

5. Material characteristics and safe handling

The source presentation explains selected physical and working properties of raw lacquer and processed lacquer, including drying behavior, environmental sensitivity and the need for appropriate handling conditions.

It also notes that contact with raw lacquer may cause skin reactions for some users. For that reason, this resource treats safe handling and basic workshop precautions as part of responsible educational use.

6. Selected tools and craft practices

The resource introduces selected tool groups and working methods associated with lacquer practice, such as scraping, brushing, sanding, inlay-related tools and powdered-material tools, as well as selected decorative processes.

In this resource, these techniques are not presented as exhaustive technical instructions. They are presented as examples of how material knowledge, hand skills and workshop traditions are linked in lacquer practice.

7. Biocultural heritage significance

Lacquer practice can be understood as part of biocultural heritage because it brings together plant-based material knowledge, practical skills, local experience, transmission through teaching and workshop tradition, and the cultural meanings attached to finished works.

The educational purpose of this resource is therefore twofold: first, to introduce lacquer as a plant-derived material practice; second, to highlight why traditional knowledge should be approached with respect, careful documentation and awareness of community participation and benefit-sharing principles.

8. Intended audience and educational use

This resource is intended for civil society organizations, researchers, cultural practitioners and the general public. It is suitable for awareness-raising, introductory teaching, public communication and non-commercial learning.

It is not a legal opinion and it should not be understood as a claim of ownership over traditional knowledge held by communities or practitioners. Any future use beyond educational and non-commercial purposes should respect applicable law, community participation and fair and equitable benefit-sharing.

9. Suggested ABSCH thematic orientation

This resource is most appropriately understood within ABSCH as an awareness-raising and educational resource related to traditional knowledge associated with natural materials. Recommended thematic orientation includes: Nagoya Protocol; access to traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources; non-commercial purposes; benefit-sharing; non-monetary benefits; awareness-raising; capacity-building; plants; and forest-related themes.

Recommended resource categories	Communication materials; Learning materials; Presentation; Website-linked resource
Suggested target groups	Civil society; General public; Indigenous peoples and local communities; Researchers/academia
Suggested level	Basic (or Basic + Intermediate, if multi-level selection is allowed)

10. Rights and use note

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11. Source note

Adapted and curated by WICHF from educational and reference materials on natural lacquer sap and traditional lacquer practices in China.

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