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Evelyne Gauché

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Tourismification of a Shui Village in the Mountainous Province of Guizhou (South China): Imaginaries and the Use of Landscape for Political Ends

Evelyne Gauché

Introduction

- ¹ In China, after the country opened up to the rest of the world and launched its international tourist policy in 1978, thanks to Deng Xiao Ping, the beginning of the 1980s saw the promotion of domestic tourism as a tool for the development of poor rural regions. Today, domestic tourists who come mainly from the Han and urban middle class, represent the majority of tourist flows inside the country (Taunay, 2011; Véron, 2013). Since the beginning of the 2000s, with the new take on rural areas¹, at the instigation of the Central State and according to an official standard model, domestic tourism has been developing in rural areas, and particularly those populated by ethnic minorities, such as in the mountainous Province of Guizhou (Figure 1). In the Southwest of the Province, the region covered by the Qiannan Prefecture –which is enclosed because of the landscape– benefits today from a road and rail infrastructure development, which contributes to the tourismification of the Shui villages that, up until then, were very much on the margin.

Figure 1: Sandu and the Qiannan Prefecture in the Province of Guizhou

- 2 Realization E. Gauché. Outline map from: https://chine.in/guide/guizhou_1850.html.
- 3 In China, the Han, which is the ethnic group in power, represents more than 92% of the population, the remaining 8% being made up of 55 national minorities which have been affected by the country's late development (Cao, Dehoorne, 2009). In the Guizhou Province where 70% of the working population live off farming, the traditionally animist Shui community is 410 000 strong (Auzias, Labourdette, 2016), and resides mainly in the Qiannan Prefecture and, more specifically, in the *xian* (district) of Sandu (Figure 1), where they almost represent the entire Shui population of China. The Shui are one of only two minorities in Guizhou with their own writing system, which is made up of around 100 pictograms². The name Shui ("water" in Chinese), was allocated to the "people of the water" by the Han in 1956, because they live near rivers. The Shui call themselves 'Sui' which also means water in their language.
- 4 This study, undertaken within the framework of the ANR AQAPA Project³, was conducted in the Shui village of Shuige (2612 inhabitants in 2014). This village, which in the past was isolated and characterised by an agricultural economy based mainly on home consumption, underwent various transformations aiming at highlighting Shui landscape and culture, according to the Han State tourismification model, which we are going to examine here through the prism of imaginaries. The objective of this article is to show that, based on the case of the Shui minority, through the official State tourismification model which was conceived at the national level, and applied in different forms within the different provinces of the national territory, the landscape is being used for political purposes. As highlighted by R. Spichiger and Forney (2005), "the exploitation potential of the landscape for political purposes is remarkable". In the Chinese case, the landscape is, through tourism, used as a pretext for the economic development and upgrade of rural areas, but with a view to building Chinese identity. This consideration is underlain by two inter-related questions: what representations about the landscape are mobilised by the Han tourismification model, and what

purpose does this model serve? How does the Shui population –with its highly specific culture– perceive this model and the effect it has on their everyday life?

- 5 After setting out the conditions for the implementation of the State model in the village of Shuige and the representations called upon by this model, we will try to reveal the discourse underlying it: we are dealing here with complex processes and, more specifically, with strong political and identity issues obscured by the Chinese “tourist place invention” model (Knafo, 1991). We will also examine how the Shui population perceives this model, thereby opening the discussion on how the social representations⁴ of the landscape have been transformed among the Shui. This study relies, among others, on semi-structured interviews conducted in July 2014 and August 2016 with residents of Shuige (with our sample relying mainly on the households of small farmers with lands of between 2 and 4 mu⁵, which are representative of the population, and on a few members of the municipal council).

State tourismification model through the prism of imaginaries: the case of the village of shuige

A transformed landscape resource

- 6 The landscape resource of the village territory, like that of the centre and south of the Province of Guizhou, relies on conical limestone mountains of average height (around 1500 m), typical of karsts landforms. The slopes are partially covered with forests and the valley bottoms with terraced rice paddies; in between, the lower slopes are covered with rain-fed crops (maize, chilli and plums). As is often the case in Guizhou (Dan, 2005), farming is organised around the rice-fish-duck system, with the ducks helping to rid paddies of pests, and the flood water on the terraces being used for fish farming. Situated at the foot of the mountains, the dwellings are traditionally made of wood, although bricks have been increasingly used for their construction since a main communication road was built, after being financed by the youth of the village who went to work in cities in the East of the country.
- 7 Unlike in the majority of cases where the process is top-down, i.e. where agents of the *xian* canvass the region within the framework of the provincial policy, and with a view to selecting villages with touristic potential, in Shuige, betting on tourism to bring the village out of poverty was done on the initiative of the local political elite. Indeed, in 2005, the municipal council compiled an application file listing official touristic points of interest (*jingdian*⁶) under the supervision of a representative from the *xian* of Sandu, and introducing the Mao Festival (Mao being a month of the Shui calendar). This major annual harvest and love festival, celebrated by the entire Shui population, takes place specifically in Shuige. The highlight of the festival is the moment when all start singing on the Mao Mountain, a site that would have been determined by the ancestors based on egg reading, eggs being considered as the symbol of the universe.
- 8 Like several other villages also selected in the province, Shuige received funds for its “conversion” into an official tourist spot. As pointed out by B. Taunay (2011), this complicity between local and State actors is a condition for the success of tourismification, since – and even in the case of a bottom-up process – it is always the State that, at the local (*xian*) level through the provincial level, launches a tourist place and plans its development. However, apart from the Mao Festival which brings in a few

thousand visitors each year (mainly friends and members of local families), tourists never stay longer than a few hours or a day in Shuige and amount to no more than 500 people more or less on a good month, mainly Chinese, otherwise of Asian origin. On average, less than ten buses per month drive to Shuige within the framework of organised excursions, all other tourists driving their own cars to get there. The village of Shuige has found it difficult to develop when competing with other, more attractive sites in the province.

- 9 The village underwent important transformations. A large public square engraved on the floor with Shui pictograms was built on rice paddies (photo 1). It was equipped with an eco-museum; the main wooden houses around the square were improved with new architectural elements, and some of the brick houses were covered with wood to reinforce the picturesque quality of the village. Paintings evoking Shui culture were executed on the walls of the school, and Shui inscriptions were placed on the walls of the museum and several houses. Statues of fish were placed on the roofs and different wooden items displaying a picturesque “traditional” architecture were built: a large gate also engraved with inscriptions at the entrance of the tourist perimeter; covered bridges crossing rivers; kiosks and belvederes. Finally, a circuit called Lovers’ Valley was created through the village and its boundaries, allowing tourists to go through 16 *jingdian*, represented on a map exhibited in the square, and signalled along the walk by signposts. They correspond mainly to the new village constructions (museum, square, gate etc.), to Shui places of belief with explanatory signposts (venerated stones and trees granting protection, votive caves, springs with fertility power for couples), to waterfalls as well as the Mao Mountain, the most symbolic place in the village.

Photo 1: the Square of Shuige and, on the right, the eco-museum

Source: E. Gauché.

- 10 All these transformations are to be understood within the framework of the State tourismification model.

Han logic behind the creation of tourist attractions

- 11 In addition to economic development, domestic tourism also aims at building a sense of national identity (Oakes, 1998; Taunay, 2009). This includes developing the wealth of the Chinese nation in particular, through the tourismification of the cultural diversity of ethnic minorities. This much is clear when viewing the official Website of the China National Tourist Office (2016), where Guizhou characteristics are given as “the ancient simplicity of national folklore, the distinctive characteristic of the national culture and the peculiarity of customs.”
- 12 In order to create this sense of national unity, the Chinese State developed tourist attractions in direct relation with “famous picturesque places” (*mingsheng*) visited by artists of the Tang and Song dynasties (618-1279), and later by the cultivated nobles of the classic era (15th-16th centuries), by bringing back into fashion, at the beginning of the 1980s, the travelogues of these nobles (Taunay, 2009). This brought the Chinese people to create an imaginary of their territory, built around “beautiful landscapes”, the *shanshui* landscapes in particular (literally “the mountains and waters”)⁷. These are part of the landscapes that each and every person, in China, knows about and dreams of visiting at least once in their life, as the quintessence of landscapes (Taunay, 2010).
- 13 Many of today’s official tourist attractions in China are these famous sites, while other categories of *mingsheng* were created subsequently. The State stimulated and stereotyped the way Chinese people perceive tourist spots and practice tourism. The main objective was to fix tourism firmly in a national tradition, while controlling its ideological content and the country’s conveyed image, through precisely identified predefined circuits and tourist attractions (Nyiri, 2006). Where these sites have been standardised according to the State model, they also correspond to the formatted taste of Chinese tourists.

Hanisation, Shuification and modernisation of the landscape

- 14 The (re)discovery of the countryside by Chinese tourists, takes place in “original places synthesising a rurality which has been invented and reconstructed for city dwellers” (Véron, 2013). The tourismification model of the village of Shuige relies on three processes that are found, to varying degrees, in all the villages of mountainous regions with touristified ethnic minorities⁸.
- 15 The process we call *Hanisation* –expression generally used as regards the policy of the Chinese State towards border regions (Veg, 2009; Allès, 2011)– corresponds to the superimposition of the landscape imaginary of the Han central State, onto the landscape of minorities. According to our interpretation of the process, this imagined landscape refers to one of the symbolic components of Chinese aesthetics and spirituality (Escande, 2005), *shanshui*, brought into play through the garden layout of tourist attractions. The forms of this layout aim at staging sites in such a way as to develop this Han conception of the ideal Chinese landscape represented by *shanshui*. Indeed, *shanshui* painting is at the foundation of the art of Chinese gardens (Escande, 2005), which spread thereafter throughout East Asia (Berque, 2010). As defined by Y. Escande (2005), *shanshui* “is always composed of mountains or rocks and –usually fresh– water, mist, plants and moss, sometimes trees, the moon, buildings, animals and figures.” Inspired by this model, the art of Chinese gardens is founded on harmony

between four elements (water, stones, constructions and plants), between which the *qi* (Izikowitz, 1987) –or vital energy– circulates. Another fundamental aspect of it is the course created. Indeed, “a Chinese landscape is experienced as a cultural, ritualistic and spiritual journey” (Escande, 2005). The garden must surprise walkers, by means of varied viewpoints, a “landscape that changes as one walks” (Wei, 2016), “paths with twists and turns, winding their way, like on a mountain trail” (Escande, 2005). In addition, the role of the inscriptions leading to the harnessing of cosmic energy, contributes to revealing the genius of the Chinese place and to leading walkers towards the wisdom path (Escande, 2005).

- 16 This reference to the *shanshui* model and to the Chinese garden, is translated into different aspects of the development of tourist attractions, as illustrated by the village of Shuige: the development of the water features and the views on the mountain via laid out viewpoints, a picturesque “traditional” architectural style reminiscent of that appearing in *shanshui* paintings, and all the built components making up the “scenery of the garden” (Escande, 2005). The use of Shui inscriptions and bringing out Shui beliefs and legends throughout the winding and steep circuit of Lovers’ Valley, reinforce the spirituality of the place and give it a poetic nature. The development of the Shuige site is designed as a “garden stroll” (Escande, 2005), with the gate indicating the entrance to the “garden”.
- 17 Shuige being a Shui village, the process we refer to as the “Shuification” of the landscape, aims at reinforcing the visibility of its ethnic specificities, with the addition of different scenic elements (symbols, Shui writing, paintings, architectural ornamentation), dancing and singing “shows”, as well as an eco-museum⁹. Yet, while these elements are quite representative of Shui culture, there is nothing authentic about their use for touristic purposes. Shui writing is a ritual writing only known to geomancers; therefore it is not customary to write in Shui on the walls of buildings. Fish statues placed on the roofs of houses, under the pretext that the fish is the most symbolic animal in Shui culture (where it is eaten during holidays, offered to sacred stones and trees, and brings protection to the living and the dead), is in no way an element of the traditional architecture, just as Shui villages do not traditionally have a centrality constituted by a square. Moreover, the dancing and singing used to take place only on Mao Mountain, and today the dancers are sometimes no longer Shui. All these transformations, leading to the creation of an alleged authenticity, in which forgery becomes “more true than the truth” (Eco, 1985), correspond to what is expected by Chinese tourists who, in the majority of cases, admire this “fake” heritage and prefer to “live a modern experience rather than an authentic one” (Taunay, 2011).
- 18 With Hanisation and Shuification comes indeed the modernisation of the villages, which is meant to make them accessible and equipped to welcome tourists who require modernity. As a result, any official tourist village must be in possession of basic requirements, such as roads linked to the national road network, a bus service, parking, fire protection, waste water drainage, lighting and public toilets. These elements of modernity are integrated into the traditional architectural landscape, as illustrated by Shuige: street lights sporting Shui pictograms along the road, a wooden house with Shui-style benches on the parking lot, and statues of fish on the roof of the wooden toilet building.
- 19 Far from being antinomic, Hanisation, Shuification and modernisation are very much intertwined by a modernity which consists in “making old things out of new” (Taunay,

2011), a “traditionalised” modernity integrated into a Hanised landscape, and a modernised tradition adapted to tourists’ taste. The whole constitutes a complex process destined to fashion tourist attractions in accordance with the message which the central State wants to convey.

A discourse at the service of national identity construction

- 20 Just as other tourist areas, such as protected areas, were at the origin of the elaboration of national discourses (Héritier, 2015), in China, in touristified ethnic minority villages, we also find the construction of a national discourse. Tourism makes it possible for the Chinese Nation “to build itself through narration” and “to narrate its own story while building itself” (Héritier, 2013). More than an educational dimension, the patriotic dimension (Oakes, 1998) is what underlies the discourse on Chinese tourist attractions. Founded mostly on history, it also includes a prospective dimension developed around the construction of socialist campaigns and China’s cultural position in the world.

Domination and Superiority of the Han, Folklorisation of the Shui

- 21 This narration relies on the domination and superiority of the Han people, whose name is based on that of the Han dynasty (206-220 BC), which is considered as one of the golden eras of Chinese history (through the reconstruction of the Empire in particular). According to J. Fréches (2013), this denomination is synonymous with *imperium*, and the vision of a “great Han China” will guide the policy of all emperors. The Han have always considered that it was their duty to unify their nation, within a territory where the minorities living on the outskirts have to be subjugated.
- 22 In this sense, and as pointed out by Y. Escande (2005), the aesthetic and spiritual *shanshui* model is also intimately linked to power symbolism, as is demonstrated through its usage in royal and imperial gardens. The most symbolic example of it is undoubtedly the garden of the old Summer Palace in Beijing which, beyond the image of heaven on earth, was a representation of the Empire in a microcosmos, the manifestation of the centralising will of the emperor (Che, 2000). This model, which comes from cultivated nobles and Mandarins, contributes to the acculturation of minorities. According to J. Frèches (2013), “when the communist regime came to power, the Han mechanism to acculturate ethnic minorities was resumed inexorably; this did not prevent the authorities from encouraging folkloric events, so as to show that they respect differences.” On the other hand, this process is reminiscent of Hanisation through population settlement, as has been occurring in the autonomous peripheral regions of China. In this regard, T. Oakes (1995) does point out the colonising nature of tourism in Guizhou...
- 23 The idea of Han domination is associated to that of their superiority. E. Allès (2011) points out that, in the mind of the Chinese Communist Party, the Han are considered as the most evolved population, contrasting with “under-developped” minority populations, also perceived as “representative of the past” (Gladney, 2004). “Through their highly folklorised representation, (...) minorities contribute to building Han modernity. One is defined in contrast to the other, the other being from inside China” (Allès, 2011). One can feel this sense of Han superiority with tourists (Oakes, 1997), who

project over minorities an exotic image, symptomatic of what L. Schein (1997), in her studies on the Province of Guizhou, calls “internal orientalism”, where she shows, among other things, that the maturity and superior level of the dominant culture are components of modern Chinese identity. Going to visit minorities such as the Shui with their animist legends and beliefs, enables mainly urban Han tourists to assert their cultural distance from populations that, to them, seem “exotic” (a distance which is characterised, if only, by the way they dress). As such, by observing ethnic minorities, “tourists reinforce their own sense of belonging to a “modern” society (Leicester, 2008) and *de facto* place themselves, via this *exoticism*¹⁰, in a relation of domination (Staszack, 2008).

- 24 In Shuige, when a tourist bus arrives, and the village has been warned beforehand by the organising agency, the tourists are welcomed in front of the large gate by women wearing traditional clothes and offering rice alcohol. Singing, dancing and the sale of arts and crafts are organised in the village Square. The eco-museum is opened for the occasion. The tourists go on the Lovers’ Valley circuit with the village tourist guide, then leave the village. What is given here to tourists is an idealised, essentialising and folklorising story of Shui culture. The Shui appear as people with enduring traditions, picturesque villages and ancestral traditional agricultural practices. The caricatured Shuification achieved is a party to this folklorisation, a process which is indeed translated into the simplification and popularisation of traditions, so as to only keep what is picturesque is that culture (Xiang, 2011). At the same time, it also has the effect of freezing cultural traditions (Allès, 2011). Beyond this, there might even be a tendency to Disneylandising (Brunel, 2012) minorities and their villages. However, this process is still hardly characteristic in Shuige, compared to other Shui villages in the *xian* of Sandu, such as Gulu (Meunier, 2016) which is under transformation, with the construction of a real amusement park, or in the Province of Guizhou, as illustrated with Xijiang among the Miao (Ged, 2010), which has been developed for mass tourism.

Assertion of the socialist ideal

- 25 This narrative, at the service of the grandeur of the Han-dominated Chinese nation, also outlines in the background the development of the socialist ideal. In this regard, C. Mackerras (1984) specifies that preserving the traditional folklore of Chinese minorities is secondary and that, what counts above all for the Chinese government, is to ensure that the said minorities reach the level of a modern socialist society. Building infrastructure also enables the Chinese Government to assert its power over the rural areas (Véron, 2013) by bringing them economic development. For a State with an egalitarian ideology (Gentelle, 2004), “tourism as such becomes not only a tool for development, but also for legitimising the Party, a real political tool” (Sofield, Li, 1998). The representation of minorities on promotional posters for tourism, within the Province of Guizhou (as everywhere else), showing people smiling, radiating happiness in a forest landscape or in plush fields, is reminiscent of what G. Lavoie (1986) calls “the socialist act, that of abundant harvest, *joie de vivre* and intoxicating optimism. As such, it seems that the function of tourismification among ethnic minorities is to idealise reality, in order to ensure a better socialist ideal”.

Sinitic issue

- 26 Beyond this, the entire complex process reflected by this model questions Chinese identity itself, through the notion of “sinity” as explained by Y. Zhang (*in* Cheng, ed., 2007). Indeed, China has been developing a “cultural nationalism” as an alternative to the Western model, denounced as a new form of hegemony similar to “cultural colonisation”. From then on, the call for modernity during the 1980s appeared as an unconscious subjection to the dominant Western discourse. The definition of a national discourse alone, in this case “sinity”, makes it possible for China to free herself from such alienation, and to assert her own identity founded on the essential values of Chinese culture. China or the “Middle Empire”, which is always demonstrating a “centrality complex”, dreams of a “cultural renaissance” matching her rise to economic power. For the author, sinity partakes of an identity discourse, resorting to the mythical existence of an immutable tradition and irreducible originality, an essentialist image of the nation which, in fact, is found in urban theme parks (David, 2007), and which, according to Tim Oakes (1998), is spread by tourism as a nationalistic project.
- 27 The tourismification of rural areas reveals the seemingly contradictory objectives which the Chinese State is seeking to reconcile: rigid application of socialism, conservation¹¹ of traditions, modernisation and preservation of national unity (Sofield, Li, 1998). How do minorities perceive this model? What do the Shui say about the changes carried out in their village through tourismification?

The State Model: A Success?

- 28 Surveys conducted with the population showed that the Shui recognise themselves in the narrative of themselves built by the State, and are adhering to the tourismification model.

Large adherence to the model by the Shui

- 29 The transformations of their daily landscape have been appropriated and appreciated by the residents, firstly for aesthetic reasons – the developments carried out are considered as beautiful, and secondly because these developments appear as new places of sociability (Square, bridges, kiosques, etc.). Moreover, the residents’ take on what needs to be shown to tourists, coincides with that of the State, as implemented by the *xian*: singing and dancing (even with modernised costumes), traditional skills (clothing, material, rice alcohol), local produce (plums) and, in the landscape, nature for aesthetic and spiritual reasons – river, springs, waterfalls, Mao Mountain, caves, sacred stones and trees. These elements are all components of the *shanshui* landscape. At the same time, they correspond to *jingdian* and are perceived as such, while the (natural as well as artificial) *jingdian* as a whole are considered as the elements of interest of the village. “I wish to show tourists the museum, the bridges near the Mao Mountain, the springs, all the things that have been built for tourism. Because there is nothing else interesting here” (Wu Yongfen, 46 years old, small farmer). As to Wu Xiangzhong (63 years old, small farmer), her opinion is that “when tourists come to the village, they like it when we show them the *jingdian*, i.e. the places that were built

specially for tourists. And the Mao Festival, and our traditions. Why? Because these are the real things here.”

- 30 Residents call on official imaginaries when they speak about the tourist landscape of their village. Therefore there is wide consensus on what the State want tourists to see, what residents wish to show tourists and what tourists want to see. What are the reasons for this adherence?

Search for modernity and integration of *shanshui* culture

- 31 The residents of Shuige wish for tourism development which they perceive in a very positive light. The financial benefits, admittedly small but appreciated, which are generated by the dancing shows, the sale of arts and crafts and the bus excursions organised by agencies, are managed by the whole village community and are redistributed to the residents of the touristified area (at the rate of 40 to 100 yuans, i.e. around 6 to 14 Euros, per person and per year). The improvement of the transports, to the general satisfaction, has led to the installation of new equipment and services (college, boarding, small shops). At the same time, tourism opens the village to the outside world via the visit of “foreigners” which, according to the villagers, also makes it possible to protect and enhance their culture. For “if there is no tourism, all this will be lost. But if our village becomes a well-known tourist attraction, then the government will help us protect our culture” said Wu Yongqi (64 years old, small farmer), and “our life will be improved, then residents will stay and our culture will be better preserved” (Feng Qiong, 40 years old, secretary of the Communist Party). Tourism enables the youth to discover or get better acquainted with their culture. “Nowadays, there are books on Shui culture for children. That’s thanks to tourism” (Wu Qi Ji, 35 years old, small farmer). Pan Xio (64 years old, small farmer) agrees: “When tourists come, we show them our culture (our dances, our songs...), and so our children see this from when they are small already”. And Wu Zuke (53 years old, secretary of the municipal council), who is from a neighbouring hamlet, highlights: “the young people who live at the centre of the village are better acquainted with their culture than [those who live] here in my area”.
- 32 While Shui adherence to the model is explained by their expectation of modernity, it also comes from their acculturation. Historically, ethnic minorities indeed acquired *shanshui* culture via progressive acculturation from the 14th century onwards (Y. Escande, verbal communication, 13 March 2015), and today have integrated it fully. This can be seen nowadays in Shui homes if only, that often include at least one *shanshui* painting on a wall –which actually constitutes a sign of increased social value– while *shanshui* landscapes appear also as background in certain TV series. On the other hand, the tourist outlook of the entire Chinese population has been formatted by the State, and the young people who went to work in cities have also often had the opportunity to visit tourist attractions.

Transformation of the social representations of the landscape

- 33 The acculturation of ethnic minorities is still reinforced by their contact with Han tourists who, by sharing with the Shui population their desire for landscapes fashioned

according to the model, contribute to influencing the latter by having the Shui population adhering to it.

- 34 While the model called for a few criticisms in Shuige, these remain very limited: wooden gates too small, degradation of the wood cladding on brick houses, accidents caused by fish statues breaking off from roofs. The low quality of the equipment built by the State is indeed often criticised in touristified rural China (Ged, 2009). However, these criticisms appear very secondary compared to the general satisfaction of seeing the village becoming a tourist destination which, it seems, is still not enough in the eyes of the residents who have been applying for more financial support from the *xian*, with a view to amplifying its development.
- 35 From now on, for the Shui, the hanised and shuified landscape constitutes a heritage to be protected (in 2014, the entire village opposed the construction of a new brick house on the edge of the square), a heritage which is not based on what is authentic and old but on what has been produced by and for tourismification. The residents in fact increasingly see their daily landscape through the eyes of what interests tourists (*jingdian* in particular), and which is what, nowadays, gives value to the landscape. Today, for example, the villagers regret having sold stones bearing ancient Shui inscriptions (these being authentic). The internalisation of this “touristic outlook” (Leicester, 2008) can also be perceived through a comment made by Pan Xio (64 years old, small farmer), concerning the gate at the entrance of the tourist perimeter: “Each time we have visitors, relations or friends who come here, they use this gate and say: “oh it’s beautiful”, and so I think it’s a good thing to show it to tourists. And now I also find this gate beautiful”. Furthermore, the wooden houses on the Square with Shuified architecture are, in the eyes of the villagers, of greater interest for tourists than the old authentic houses in the village.

Conclusion

- 36 While we could have expected sharp conflicts, as is generally the case when a national State imposes a model on a population, there were, at the most, only a few disagreements on the conditions for the implementation of the model from the village of Shuige, and the *xian* of Sandu as a whole, and neither questioned the Han State model for tourist development. This can be explained mainly with the formatting by a strong State within a “hypernormative society” (Véron, 2013), and with stereotyped imaginaries of the landscape and tourist practices, which have standardised the outlook of the entire Chinese population, including minorities living in the mountains. *Hanisation*, *Shuification* and modernisation of the landscape, far from being antagonistic, are on the contrary complementary and interlinked processes, and are accepted despite –or by virtue of– the artifice generated by them.
- 37 The result of the existence and success of the tourismification State model, even if the population appropriated this landscape built through the eyes of others to make it its own, is that in actual fact, as expressed by T. Leicester (2008), “the landscape belongs to the agents that run it (i.e. the authorities and investors) as well as the tourists who consume it, and not to local residents”. Indeed, generally, it is a rural tourism from which rural people are largely excluded (Leicester, 2008; Ged, 2009), a tourism that does not prevent the migration of young people: when it increases in scale, the benefits are then monopolised by various investors (public or private companies, local

governments) and, when this is not the case, it generates at best low income for a very small section of the population (the touristified area of Shuige in this case). For their part, in reality tourists achieve only an “indirect consumption of the landscape” (Déry, 2012), i.e. a consumption that went through the filter of the nationalistic imaginary of the State. Tourismification makes use of the landscape, ethnic minorities as well as tourists for political ends. While there is nothing new about using the landscape for the benefit of discourses on unity and national identity, whether in totalitarian or, still, European (Walter, 2004) or North-American (Héritier, 2008) states, the process seems to go particularly far in China: Is not this process, through the adaptation of her imaginaries and through the folklorisation of minorities, the reflection of a disguised will for assimilation? As far as G. Lavoie (1986) is concerned, folklorisation is indeed an instrument of domination that partakes of assimilation.

- 38 Yet, while the authorities only have guarded confidence in the capacity of adherence to their model by ethnic minorities (Fréches, 2013), despite the exploitation, folklorisation and essentialisation underlying this capacity, the Shui population remains persuaded that tourism, via the State model, will protect their culture while bringing modernity, economic development and better living standards. As for tourists, most do not question this model either (Nyiri, 2006). Is this not proof that the strategy of the State has succeeded? It is proof, in any case, as pointed out by T. Oakes (1998), that “tourism is an industry run by the power of representations”, where the construction of these representations must be linked with the history of Chinese thinking (Cheng, 2002). Tourism contributes inevitably to the evolution of imaginaries while producing them. Nonetheless, the fact remains that one “of the problems posed by modernity, is the loss of deep meaning underlying the landscape which is characteristic of traditional societies” (Berque, 2016). What happens to the representations of the landscape that are specific to Shui culture? The State model seems quite indifferent to it.

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NOTES

1. During the Cultural Revolution, going to the country was synonymous with suffering and re-education through peasant labour (Taunay, 2011).
2. Type of Chinese characters representing something concrete directly with a drawing. These are usually considered as the oldest characters.
3. AQAPA (2014-2019): "Whom Do Landscape Belong to in Asia? Tourismification of the Highlands in Southern Asia: Social Dynamics and Landscape Heritagisation in Rural Areas with Ethnic Minorities", project managed by the UMR CNRS 7324 CITERES of the University of Tours.
4. As per D. Jodelet's meaning (2003), i.e. as a "form of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, having a practical design and contributing to the construction of a reality shared by a social whole". We reserve more generally the term 'imaginaries', in the sense of mental images (Di Méo, 2016), for the representations that tourists or public actors project on the territories of ethnic minorities.
5. 1 ha = 15 mu, 1 mu = 0,07 ha.
6. This word, according to the Dictionary of contemporary Chinese (1994), means "tourist spot" or, still, "picturesque site to visit".
7. *Shanshui* is a Chinese word that took on the meaning of landscape in the poetry of the cultivated nobility of the middle of the 4th century (Berque, 1995; Escande, 2005).
8. As observed in the field, for example among the Miao, or still the Dong in Zhaoxing (district of Liping) where, after entering through a monumental door on paying a fee, a water feature, a water promenade, wooden bridges, paddle wheels, wooden accommodation and paths along the water feature and the river have been built.
9. The first appeared in Guizhou in the 1990s (Jin, 2012).
10. As specified by J.F. Staszack (2008), unlike the French expression '*exotisme*' which is more ambiguous, in English *exotism* (the exotism of a thing) is distinguished from *exoticism* (a taste for the exotic).
11. If not reinvention.

ABSTRACTS

This contribution questions the build-up of touristic imaginaries, through the tourismification of a Shui village located in the mountainous Province of Guizhou (China). The growth of the tourism industry in the rural areas driven by the State in the early 1980s, has been going on according to a highly standardised official model. Not only did it aim at fostering economic development, but also at making up national identity. It is founded on a stereotyped vision of the landscape, seen through the prism of the Mandarin ideal based on poetry, gardening and pictorial arts or *Shanshui*, literally ‘mounts and waters’, as well as on the folklorisation of ethnic minorities and the modernisation of the countryside. As such, it uses both landscape and populations as tools, through a national narrative of the greatness of the Chinese nation and the Han people with, in the background, the praise of the socialist ideal. Correlatively to the projection of Han imaginaries onto the daily landscape of the Shui, the social representations of this landscape are also transformed by tourism, thereby revealing how the Shui population is adhering to the State model.

INDEX

Keywords: landscape, representations, rural spaces, Shui ethnic minority, tourism, China

AUTHOR

EVELYNE GAUCHÉ

PhD, Lecturer in Geography, University of Tours, UMR CNRS 7324 CITERE
evelyne.gauche@univ-tours.fr