From the “Other” to the “Self”: Turning Cameras Around in Lashi Hai (China)

De « l'autre » au « soi » : retournement des appareils photos à Lashi Hai (Chine)

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The State, Tourism and the “Self”

- ¹ Lashi Hai, my case study site in northwest Yunnan, is a typical destination for what many scholars call ethnic tourism. It is somewhere the “other” (Fabian and Bunzl 2002) can be gazed upon, and where this otherness is performed for visitors on the stage of tourist places (MacCannell 1973). The imaginary of the “other” has been shaped and nourished by various state-led discourses related to longstanding stereotypes about borderland populations, as well as by folkloristic images of ethnic culture (Harrell 2012). Lashi Hai is just the sort of place that would serve the state as being illustrative of both the harmonious multi-ethnic nation-state of China (Davis 2005; Mullaney 2011), and its benevolent intentions towards such remote rural areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups (Yeh 2013). Major infrastructure projects such as new roads, railways and airports connecting these areas to urban centres are proof of such intentions. A frequent conclusion drawn from analysis of typical ethnic tourism destinations in China is thus that ethnic tourism is a performance of folkloristic cultural elements that serves as an inwardly-directed soft power instrument (Silverman and Blumenfield 2013). But what happens if visitors lose interest in the state-imposed narrative and, instead of creating reproductions of the “other” with their cameras, prefer to frame other things of their own choosing? What if the tourists’ own selves are becoming the main focus of photographic reproductions, and the positioning of the “self” starts to determine novel tourist practices that could shape entirely new tourism landscapes?
- ² This paper analyses emerging tourist practices at a classic ethnic tourism destination in China. Considering practice an integral part of the place-making process (Pink 2012:

12), the paper aims to understand larger social tendencies and changes in relation to recently evolving tourist practices and hence the creation of new tourist landscapes (Yasue and Kazuo 2012). It demonstrates how these "local" tourist places represent an intersection of global, national and regional flows of ideas, practices and imaginaries as well as material goods and virtual trends (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Massey 1994). Here, practice (as observed by diverse actors on the stage of the local tourist place) represents the embodiment of discourses of different scales, thus demonstrating how the global is localised, and vice versa (Low 2016: 34). The use of social media in relation to emerging tourist practices increases the importance of considering the interconnectedness of places on various scales. Arjun Appadurai explains:

Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin. Always carrying the sense of distance between viewer and event, these media nevertheless compel the transformation of everyday discourse. At the same time, they are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons. (Appadurai 1996: 3)

- 3 The turning around of cameras observed at tourist places in Lashi Hai is part of such self-making experiments and thus reflects an important shift in Chinese society. This change is also connected to a new central government strategy aimed at depoliticizing various aspects of social life. This approach includes granting some limited freedoms in both public and political realms, with a view to enhancing general prosperity and wealth. Further, it asserts the individual's freedom to fashion a new modern "self" in certain domains - such as consumption, lifestyle and leisure (Zhang 2012; Zhang and Ong 2008). The stage of the touristic place has now become an important platform upon which to present and represent these "selves". How this shift - and the fact that the "other" concomitantly loses importance in the touristic product - relates to changing socio-political structures forms the main substance of the discussion below. In order to understand the broader implications of this new tendency, our analysis begins with the prevalent structures that contribute to the making of tourist objects - and thus the ethnic other - in China's ethnic tourism.

Methodology

- 4 Data presented in this article were collected by the first author in the course of her PhD research project over several fieldwork periods, each of several months' duration, between 2015 and 2018 at the case study site in Lashi Hai, Yunnan, China. The main methodological approach for collecting the data analysed was participant observation, alongside open and semi-directed interviews. Since this article focuses mainly on tourist practice, most of the observations were made at touristic places in Lashi Hai. Participant observation has the advantage of examining "what people *do* as well as what they *say*. It thus enables an insightful examination of any discrepancies between thoughts and deeds" (Herbert 2000: 552, emphasis original).
- 5 In many cases, mobile methods were applied to observing both tourists and guides in their activities (Büscher 2011). Kusenbach suggests the "go along" approach as an appropriate ethnographic method for exploring people's experience of a place. To examine perceived local problems in a Los Angeles neighbourhood from a phenomenological perspective, she walks around with her research participant while allowing them to talk about what is seen, felt and thought - all elements of experience

(Kusenbach 2003). Likewise, to better grasp tourist, local service provider and resident experiences of touristic places, I both accompanied such people and conducted my own "go alongs" - on horseback, on the tour bus, over a meal, on a hike or walk, and at a photoshoot. Data was fleshed out through key informant interviews with local and regional tourism operators, marketing, development and real estate experts, as well as with scholars and professionals in cultural businesses.

Ethnic Tourism: Authenticity and the "Other"

- 6 "Awkward and faddish as it may sound, othering expresses the insight that the Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but *made*" (Fabian 1990: 755). Both anthropology and tourism are thus, by definition, engaged in making "others". Urry (2002) has argued that "gazing" upon the unfamiliar, and thus in some cases the "other", is one of the determining practices of tourists. Based on this idea, various authors describe how people derive pleasure from "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Bruner 2004: 56, referring to Mulvey 2009: 16). The quest for authenticity, the desire to glimpse into "other" people's everyday lives, has been identified by MacCannell (1973) as the driving factor behind modern tourism. However, according to Urry (2002), the postmodern tourist appreciates touristic performances for their aesthetic or humorous value, while being well aware of their performative or "fake" nature. Similar observations have been made of Chinese domestic tourists at ethnic tourism destinations, characterising them as less critical vis-à-vis cultural performances for tourists so that, rather than searching for the authentic, they prefer to engage in the spectacle of the cultural performance and simply play along (Oakes 1998; Walsh and Swain 2004).
- 7 If an anthropological perspective is adopted (in which cultural identities are always situational and performative) the question of authenticity declines in significance (Bruner 2004: 80). Instead, Clifford suggests that we ask: "What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity?" (Clifford 1988: 275). From this perspective, structures that either determine the performance of culture in specific situations or shape representations of cultures in particular places or moments of interaction, become of interest. Such situations or moments might be tourist encounters at ethnic tourism destinations. It is important to understand that because multiple factor contribute to the performance and representation of ethnic culture at such a tourist encounter, the performed culture is more than just a spontaneous role assumed by the tourist or the "local" provider (Harrell 1995; Holland et al. 2001). The interaction often has an unwritten script that follows a touristic narrative fed by multiple sources: the destination's marketing strategy; pre-travel imaginaries about the place and its population; all kinds of media productions; state-led discourses and the many longstanding stereotypes about ethnic minorities in China (Bruner 2004; Harrell 1995). Gupta and Ferguson therefore suggest focusing on:
the growing role of the imagination of places a from distance [...] The special challenge here is to use a focus on the way space is imagined (but not imaginary!) as a way to explore the processes through which such conceptual processes of place making meet the changing global economic and political conditions of lived spaces - the relation, we could say, between place and space (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 11, emphasis original).

- 8 In this sense, in order to understand how the "other" as a touristic object is created in ethnic tourism in China, the various mechanisms that contribute to shaping the imagined places of ethnic tourism destinations must be taken into account (Oakes 1993). Gupta and Ferguson further propose:

The idea that space is made meaningful is of course a familiar one to anthropologists; indeed, there is hardly an older or better established anthropological truth. East or West, inside or outside, left or right, mound or floodplain – from at least the time of Durkheim, anthropology has known that the experience of space is always socially constructed. The more urgent task [...] is to politicize this incontestable observation. With meaning making understood as a practice, how are spatial meanings established? Who has the power to make places of spaces? Who contests this? What is at stake? (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 11)

Ethnic Tourism in China

- 9 When it comes to literature on ethnic tourism in China, what tends to remain unsaid is that the categories of ethnic groups in China, as well as related discourses reproduced in tourism, are a highly political product. The terminology defining ethnic groups, upon which the touristic product is based, refers to fairly recently-defined ethnonyms. This was done in the course of an immense ethnic classification project initiated by the Communist Party. The government's aim was to determine the exact names and number of ethnic groups (nationality groups) within its territory, in order to have representatives of each group at the first convention of the National People's Congress in 1954 (Mullaney 2011: 120). A great many social scientists and anthropologists were mobilised to manage and conduct this huge undertaking, and vast amounts of data were collected. The concept of *minzu* (nationality group), however, was not familiar to most of the people concerned, so the number of self-ascribed ethnic categories was immense. In order to reach a manageable total and a viable systematic framework for the classification, categories were ultimately determined mainly on the basis of linguistic criteria and certain cultural aspects (Mullaney 2011: 87). For each group, a set of characteristic cultural traits – such as songs, dances, clothes, festivals, language and foods – were also catalogued (Chio 2014: 25; Oakes 1998: 36–37). The fact that many different groups were merged into single categories (Mullaney 2011: 124) meant that in many cases, those categories failed to correspond to people's own understanding of their "ethnic" or cultural belonging. Today these categories are fixed; they are even printed on identity cards. The origins of ethnic status and this classification project are being forgotten among younger people (Mullaney 2011: 124). When discussing ethnicity in China, then, it should be kept in mind that these official groups do not necessarily correspond to what anthropologists would refer to as ethnic groups, where social processes of boundary-making and self-ascription remain important aspects (Barth 1998; Okamura 1981).
- 10 In ethnic tourism the official classification of groups and their cultural characteristics plays a significant role, as do the social processes of boundary-making. There is, however, a major discrepancy in that while cultures and related social identities are dynamic and constantly changing, in China fixed aspects of ethnic cultures are set in stone. And of course, after almost seventy years, those cultural characteristics neither continue to correspond to people's lives, nor to their own ideas about their culture (if indeed they ever did). Nonetheless, such folkloristic typecasting of ethnic cultures is

still heavily promoted in tourism. Ethnic minority groups in China have long suffered from being very negatively stereotyped as uncivilised, barbarian, backward, dirty and even dangerous (Harrell 1995) – and yet another stigma arrived alongside tourism development. This emerged after the Cultural Revolution, during what Oakes has called the “Cultural Turn” in China, when ethnic culture’s value to the tourism market was recognised (Oakes 1993: 58–62). At that time, a new image of colourful, cheerfully singing and dancing minority peoples evolved and were placed in immaculate natural landscapes with blue skies (a rare thing in many Chinese cities) and blooming fields of flowers as far as the eye could see. The nostalgic idea of a simple but happy life, dwelling in harmony with nature and each other, was promoted in this imaginary, which soon attracted enormous numbers of domestic travellers (Walsh and Swain 2004: 60). The new domestic tourism market grew at immense speed, and novel destinations developed throughout the country.

- 11 Many studies on ethnic tourism in China have shown how touristic development in areas inhabited by such ethnic groups is also strongly linked to political goals. On the one hand, a folkloristic image of popular ethnic tourism destinations is used to illustrate the idea of the harmonious multinational Chinese state (Bruner 2004: 97; Notar 2006: 5; Oakes 1998: 39; Walsh and Swain 2004: 62), while on the other, as many authors contend, tourism-related economic development represents a powerful tool with which central government has been able to consolidate its power and control in the area (Chao 2012; Davis 2005; Oakes 1998; Silverman and Blumenfield 2013; Yeh 2013). Policies aimed at strengthening local economies via tourism development are linked to massive infrastructure projects such as roads, railways and airports. At the same time, such projects legitimate stronger presence and control through deployment of government officials in the area (Davis 2005: 30; Oakes 1998: 132). A further side-effect of government-led development projects (or as Yeh terms it, this “gift of development”) is that they increase a sense of gratitude and indebtedness among local populations towards the central government, which inculcates a certain degree of loyalty as well (Yeh 2013).
- 12 With this Cultural Turn and the establishment of a domestic tourism market in China, another important and frequently discussed phenomenon evolved: theme park fever (Oakes 1998: 50). By 1990, there were already around 2,500 amusement parks showcasing ethnic folk culture in China (Nyíri 2006: 12). In these parks, ethnic minority groups are represented in actual-size replicas of real houses, or in even small villages, using professional actors dressed in appropriate ethnic clothing, who “inhabit” the houses. For ethnic tourism destinations in areas where people of ethnic minority status actually live, similar development strategies and visual planning have been applied afterwards (Chio 2014: 38–39). As a consequence, many of these ethnic tourism destinations appear quite theme park-like - and also resemble one another to rather a high degree (Davis 2005: 40). The fact that in China, places have to be “opened” for tourism implies that there is an official development agency responsible for the planning, organisation, branding, marketing, naming, and so forth, of such destinations (Nyíri 2006: 18). The way in which ethnic cultures are represented in these officially-developed places naturally corresponds with what is defined by the government as suitable for tourism (Vasantkumar 2014: 58–59). Varutti has compared this process of creating representations of ethnic cultures to what Lévi-Strauss conceptualised as miniatures, which:

are not so much defined by the reduced scale as by the loss of some of the features of the original: details, volume, smell, colour etc. Along these lines, museum mannequins, figurines, models, dioramas, maps and other reproductions can all be considered miniatures to the extent that, as we shall see, they have lost several of the dimensions of complexity of the originals – in this case, individuals and communities. (Varutti 2010, referring to Lévi-Strauss 1962: 23)

- 13 When ethnic culture is represented at an official ethnic tourism destination, it is reduced to a consumer-friendly, state-conforming version of itself, cutting out any uncomfortable or challenging features which fail to fit the state-made narrative (Vasantkumar 2014). It is interesting to note, however, that this also happens in places where people of minority status actually live. Instead of looking at residents' genuine everyday lives and homes, tourists are directed towards a fenced-off area where they can gaze at a miniature version of what is supposed to be "local culture". This implies that residents' actual way of life does not quite match what the government (represented through official development agencies) intends to showcase in these ethnic tourism destinations. A big advantage of the theme park strategy is that it allows the state to directly control and shape the touristic place and related experiences. Moreover, interaction with local residents is reduced to a minimum; at best they remain in fairly lowly roles as service providers. Yet for locals, this kind of development strategy has clear advantages too: as long as the visitors' focus is directed at officially designated and designed exhibition areas, there is more room for them to shape their environments and places of everyday living in line with their own wishes and ideas. The folkloristic stereotypes related to their ethnic status remain framed and gated within touristic theme parks, so that the spaces and places of everyday life can be practised differently and attributed alternative values. When looking at newer tendencies in shaping tourism's landscapes, however, the fact that the making of touristic objects is closely connected to political goals and governance strategies remains important.

Changing Tourist Landscapes in Lashi Hai

- 14 Lashi Hai is a wetland area surrounding a lake in northwest Yunnan, China. The case study was conducted in several villages on the northern shores of the lake, at the foot of forest-covered hills that lead up into the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain range. On the other side of the hills lies the famous UNESCO World Heritage site of Lijiang Old Town. One of China's most popular domestic tourism destinations, this is also the main source of Lashi Hai's daytrip visitors. Most people arriving in Lashi Hai are on a prearranged package trip organised by official travel agencies. These packages include transport, meals, tea and – most importantly – a short horse trek up into the forested hills, to one of the scenic spots offering views over the lake, wetlands and villages. There is an abundance of highly-decorated reception centres designed to attract visitors, and this has recently led to some stunning inventions. Arriving for fieldwork in 2018, I found myself suddenly confronted with a huge pink plastic sculpture – several metres high – of a high heel shoe. Not quite sure as to the purpose of such an object, I started investigating this new trend of shaping touristic landscapes.

Figure . Sculpture of a Pink High Heel at the "Rose Manor" in Lashi Hai

Source: Author

- 15 The characteristic landscapes of the area traditionally featured agricultural fields and typical Naxi houses; the Naxi are an ethnic group comprising the majority of the local population. Today, many Yi people (who used to live higher up in even more remote places), as well as Han from far and near, have moved into Lashi Hai's villages - usually either to start a business or find jobs in the tourism sector.¹ Early tourism in the area relied mainly on horse-trekking, which was organised in village cooperatives. Over time, diverse local and external investors have initiated other business models, so that competition and overlap among different providers is now huge. Meanwhile, because Lashi Hai has not yet been officially "opened" up by a proper development agency, business happens in a rather uncontrolled and unstructured way, fully exposed to the forces of the "free" (or perhaps "socialist") market economy. Reception centres come and go, and Lashi Hai looks different each time I return. The most recent development was a major break with the "archetypal" landscape (Chio 2014: 12) the area is known for: maize crops had been replaced by roses in formerly agricultural fields, with huge plastic objects towering above them.
- 16 I reached an understanding of the new development strategy through the interviews I conducted with Lashi Hai's visitors and participant observation at various visitor centres. Most of the people² I talked to indicated that they were not interested in the local culture. According to my findings, what is most important to them is the fresh air and sharing fun experiences with their friends – mainly, what they want is just to relax and enjoy themselves. What nobody specifically mentioned in these interviews, but did strike me from my observations, is that most of these people hardly ever actually relax, because they are constantly kept busy with a practice that determines the entire visit: taking photos. I addressed this issue directly in a conversation with a young couple³ on

a shuttle bus. They explained: "We spent two full hours taking pictures. We actually wanted to have a rest, but then we saw another really nice photo subject, so we had to continue taking pictures."¹⁴ The newly constructed reception centres with their rose gardens and gaudy plastic sculptures offer plentiful backgrounds and scenes where visitors can take pictures. There are even styling zones where visitors can get professional hairstyling or make-up. Furthermore, fancy dress costumes are available for rent. Whereas until a couple of years ago tourists still liked to dress up in colourful minority dress, there is a new trend evolving of renting "modern" outfits. Instead of photographing traditional houses and agricultural landscapes, people seem to prefer the fancy backdrops of these recently created parks. And instead of taking pictures of the "other" – that is, local ethnic minority people – the focus of the camera is now on very much trained on the "self". The positioning of the self in the right way within the fantasy landscapes provided at these parks includes entire codes of practice that have evolved rapidly over the past few years, so that a standard set of pictures and positions that people like to take in these places is already established.

Figure 2. Framing the "Self" in a modern tourist landscape

Source: Author

New Selves in Tourism

- ¹⁷ This behaviour is clearly not unique to Chinese domestic tourism. On the contrary, the interrelatedness of tourist practice, photography and social media has been discussed by various authors (See for example Crouch and Lubben 2003; Larsen 2013; Mourtazina 2019). The phenomenon described as "Backs' to Nature" by Kohn (2018) has been observed by many others in destinations all over the world (Lyu 2016; Dinhopl and

Gretzel 2016; Souza et al. 2015). What I found curious in Lashi Hai's case is the fact that visitors here are turning their backs on official touristic representations of ethnic culture and state-made discourses, rather than on nature. Zhang and Ong cite Yu Hua, who remarks: "If you want to talk about modern China, it's not only about money. During the Cultural Revolution there was no stage for the individual. Just the government. Now there is a stage for everyone. And you can see a show every day" (Zhang and Ong 2008: 1, referring to Yu Hua in Barboza 2006).

- 18 This increased focus on self-fashioning applies not only to visitors – it also concerns locals. People living in Lashi Hai's villages, and even residents of Lijiang's New Town, visit the parks in their leisure time, enjoying themselves taking pictures in front of the flowering roses and the plastic sculptures as well. From my observations, in addition to conversations in the field, it became apparent that both visitors and local residents enjoyed the new alternative to the somewhat hackneyed ethnic minority image, which looks way too similar in all of China's ethnic tourism destinations and is performed over and over again at every official ceremony, in television shows, films and other media productions. Instead of passively gazing at these official versions of "others", individuals may now enter the stage themselves, to perform their own social identities.
- 19 There is also a generational issue at work. Whereas the older generation (who might have experienced turbulent political times) long for a nostalgic ideal of the past featuring romantic countryside and folkloristic cultures (Walsh and Swain 2004), the "Nineties Generation", as it is called in China, is often characterised as the generation born in a prosperous time, with a desire for modernity and economic growth, as well as a stronger focus on the self as an individual (Zhang and Ong 2008). This is a generation that grew up in the one-child-policy society, where that one child received all the attention possible (Anagnost 2018). Parents raised their offspring with the intention of securing them the best education possible, so that they would one day be able to find well-paid jobs, and also take care of their parents in their old age. Today, however, they have also become a generation of tourists with increasing purchasing power and a strong interest in engaging in leisure activities and travel (Lim 2009; Zhang 2012). This generation's growing focus on the individual is also related to changes in policy-making and leadership techniques applied by the central government (Hansen and Svarverud 2010). Ong and Zhang have called this strategy "socialism from afar", which includes the cultivation of self-governing subjects (cited in Yeh 2014). The making of self-governing subjects also relates to the privatisation of property and ownership of the "self". In order to animate these new kinds of self, the government asserts "micro freedoms" for individuals (Zhang and Ong 2008: 7). The typical realms of such freedoms are the domains of livelihood, commerce, consumption and lifestyle (See also Ren 2013; Tapp 2010). Tourism is clearly another important area in which to exhibit these new and modern selves. Considering Zhang and Ong's critical standpoint on the issue, which suggests that neoliberal consumption draws attention away from political issues, including those related to ethnic minorities, in Lashi Hai's tourism destinations this has certainly been the case. In this particular instance, however, I have found this tendency to be in line with the interests of both visitors to Lashi Hai and its residents. The focus on the self, and the growing lack of interest in official folkloristic representations of ethnic minority culture also concerns the young generation of locals. In response to my question about what she wished for Lashi Hai's future development, my local translator and co researcher Sandy replied: "The horses should be washed and made to look

pretty. If we want the tourists to be satisfied, we have to pay attention to questions of cleanness and order. Also, at the moment we do only have things based on history. Now we should also add some modern aspects. We have to develop ourselves and our own cultural characteristics (...)”⁵. I was told by various residents that they were proud of the new reception centre with its rose fields and plastic sculptures, as this represents something completely novel and different from the negative stereotypes discriminating against ethnic minority people as backward and dirty. The co-manager of one reception centre answered to the same question thus: “All our scenic spots there is basically only natural things. What we need is to decorate them a bit, build some man made, modern things. The landscape is too monotonous, there is only the villages, mountains and water. If I had money, I would make some kind of fun park, and add some colourful things to make the places look more interesting.”⁶ The rose manor with its plastic sculptures provides exactly what she has in mind. For many residents, the park represents innovation, elegance and modernity – values both visitors and residents like to be associated with. Often, on returning from a day of field work, photos taken during the day appeared on my mobile phone the minute it reached WiFi. Sandy had already posted them on WeChat⁷, presenting us and the fancy backdrop of roses and the plastic sculpture to the online community. She obviously enjoyed sharing the new look given to the surroundings of her home village with her friends from near and far. It allowed her to create a new image of herself and the place she comes from – different from the stereotypes that still dominate people’s imaginings of the place. Cameras have turned away from the stigmatized “other” as the fashioning and positioning of the “self” in those fantasy and dreamlike landscapes has become more important to both visitors and residents. It is now possible for both to focus on their individual selves and to create representations of these in the modern landscapes of Lashi Hai’s tourist destinations.

Representing New “Selves” in Depoliticized Landscapes

- 20 The Cultural Turn has led to the creation of countless ethnic tourism destinations in China (Nyíri 2006; Oakes 1998). While tourism in Lashi Hai has not yet been subjected to an official development project, its touristic product is nevertheless based on an officially sanctioned, folkloristic version of ethnic culture. As discussed, there is a general tendency in China to separate touristic places from everyday life by establishing ethnic theme parks in which replica ethnic minority villages can be visited. However, since the popularity of minority culture and nostalgia for a romantic rural life seems to be waning among the younger population, new trends are contributing to the shaping of touristic landscapes. Social media and “selfie culture” play a crucial role in this process. Instead of focusing on the “other” – in this case, ethnic minority people and their culture – visitors prefer to position their “selves” in the touristic landscapes and frame them in their travel photos. The lack of interest in local culture, and the shift of focus towards one’s own experiences and pleasure were very directly expressed in interviews conducted in the field. Furthermore, participant observation revealed that people spend large amounts of time taking pictures in those spaces built especially for this purpose. As at any tourism destination around the globe, these pictures are taken to be shared on social media platforms. They thus represent an

important means of communicating about the "self" and demonstrating this part of one's social identity to others (Souza et al. 2015).

- 21 In China, this tendency reflects significant changes in society that are related to shifting political strategies. The fashioning of "self-governing subjects" represents an important part of the country's intention to establish "socialism from afar". This kind of system allows for "micro freedoms" in which the individual gets to animate certain domains of their self-fashioning. Tourism, photography and social media have become important means of showcasing these new "selves". The establishment of codes of practice governing what content needs to be framed in the picture and how this should be done is sped up by modern means of communication, such as the diversity of social media channels and networks. The fact that these codes suggest turning the camera around 180 degrees to focus on the self, rather than on ethnic minorities, means turning one's back on folkloristic representations of ethnic cultures. It also implies turning one's back on political issues to focus on solipsistic, individual pleasures. This consequence is in line with state policies which aim to depoliticize subjects, offering consumption and commerce as substitutes for more limited freedoms in other realms. Yet at the same time, it is an alternative much appreciated by local residents and visitors alike, as it moves away from the government's earlier strategies of "indoctrainment" (Nyíri 2009), where tourism was mainly used to communicate and spread political propaganda. Of course, the argument here is that propaganda now happens at a more subtle level, by depoliticizing society and using the prospect of material prosperity and wealth to distract from certain social and political restrictions. In the case of ethnic minority cultures, this shifting of focus does however allow for new space, creating "holes in the wall" (Oakes 1993) of rigid ethnic categories filled with stereotypes, which can now be filled with new material: individual ideas of what people themselves would like to be and how they might be represented.

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NOTES

1. It is important to mention that the term "local residents" does not refer to one specific ethnic group or culture. On the contrary, this article assumes there not to be any sort of homogenous group having a distinct local identity or culture, but rather suggests conceptualizing both as being performative and situational (cf. Massey 1994; Holland et al. 2001).
2. Interviews with tourists were conducted at the reception centres in spring 2017, using a short set of standard questions. The majority of the visitors were between 20 and 40 years old and came from urban regions. There was however a wide variety of geographic origins, with visitors from all over the country.
3. A couple in their mid-twenties from a town near Chengdu in Sichuan Province.
4. Conversation quoted in field notes from 15.11.2018 in Junliang Village, Lashi Hai.
5. Interview in Lashi Hai, 08.05.2017 with Sandy (fictional name), 24 years old. As co-researcher and translator between Mandarin and the local Naxi language, Sandy contributed a great deal to my field research. She had just graduated from a university in northern China and moved back to her parents' home in Lashi Hai, to find a job as a teacher.
6. Interview in Lashi Hai, 01.05.2017 with A Mu, 22 years old. She works as co-manager at one of the smaller, more traditional reception centres and is responsible for customer satisfaction. She grew up and lives in one of the villages in Lashi Hai.
7. WeChat is the most popular social media app in China, and combines diverse functions. Among other features it offers messaging as well as a platform on which to post pictures and other information.

ABSTRACTS

This paper explores changing tourist practices in an ethnic tourism destination in Yunnan, China. The recent trend of focusing on the "self" rather than the folkloristic representation of the "other" is related to shifting governance strategies in China allowing for increased individual freedoms in domains of leisure and consumption. The fashioning of these new "selves" and their representation in tourist photography becomes a crucial aspect in place making and the shaping of modern touristic landscapes in rural destinations.

Cet article explore les changements des pratiques touristiques dans une destination du tourisme ethnique située dans la province du Yunnan en Chine. La tendance récente qui consiste à mettre l'accent sur le « soi » plutôt que sur la représentation folklorique de l'« autre » est liée à une modification des stratégies de gouvernance en Chine, qui autorise plus de liberté individuelle

dans les domaines des loisirs et de la consommation. La fabrication de ces nouveaux « sois » et leur représentation dans la photographie touristique deviennent des aspects cruciaux du processus de *place making* et de la création de paysages touristiques modernes dans les destinations rurales.

INDEX

Keywords: ethnic tourism, Yunnan, China, self-making, photography, tourist practice

Mots-clés: tourisme ethnique, Yunnan, Chine, autofabrication, photographie, pratiques touristiques

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