
The cultural space of modernity: ethnic tourism and place identity in China

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Abstract. In this paper, the relationship between the political economy of tourism and ethnic cultural revival in southwest China is explored. It is suggested that cultural revival is a process of 'place creation' whereby identities may be consciously localized as a strategy for engaging structures of political economy which link local actors with broader geographical frameworks and more distant sources of power. Approaching the intersections between tourism and local cultural construction in this way reveals the inadequacy of Marxist analysis in theorizing the spatial relationship between political economy and culture. The theoretical argument has several prongs: (1) the local does not exist as an oppositional reality to the global, but rather constitutes a dynamic cultural negotiation with the changing structures of political economy, a negotiation in which dominant structures are mediated by individual agency; (2) 'modernization' is thus as much cultural as it is economic; (3) the traditional 'space of places', which a modern 'space of flows' supposedly supersedes, is an idealistic construct of the past, based on a static conception of culture kept separate from a dynamic conception of economics; (4) historical materialism perpetuates this idealism in its preoccupation with the economic power of capital, relegating the cultural to a 'response'. Last, the above approach makes it necessary to question the assumption that the 'confused identities' of postmodernity are the result of global capitalism's 'annihilation of space through time'. Rather, a highlight upon the contentious nature of 'place creation' within broader systems of power suggests that identity has never been neatly provided by a naturally bounded place, but has always been negotiated within a complex and often confusing mesh of interaction across multiple geographic scales.

Introduction

There is much concern these days with what has been called the resurgence of ethnic tribalism, that paradoxical phenomenon of localist flag-waving within the global village, the "Lebanonization" of fragmented states gasping against the cool onrush of one "McWorld" (Barber, 1992, page 53). As global forces of political economy have become more fluid, seeming to seep into every last crack of cultural isolation, localized identities have apparently become more important—and in some cases more dangerous—to construct. This construction has brought together a syncretic cultural blending in which 'traditional practice' is reconstituted within new contexts where people experience a variety of contending and dominating forces upon which local identity and meaning must be inscribed. The challenge here is to understand culture as a contemporary construction in which tradition is continually redefined by actors operating within networks of political economy which span and interact within multiple geographic scales. Feierman (1990, page 13) addresses the methodological implications of this: "The difficult task in actual historical analysis is to create a method ... which can capture the cultural categories as both continuous and in transformation, and actors as both creating new language and speaking inherited words, all at the same time". The spatial corollary to this method is not surprisingly one in which the idea of 'locality' becomes problematic: "The wider world is not external to the local community; it is at the heart of the community's internal processes of differentiation" (page 36), and thus its identity. It is Feierman's belief, as well as my own, that local identity has always been a contentious construction.

that the idea of a premodern state of unselfconscious localized identity is perhaps merely wishful thinking.

Hefner (1987) has noted that much of Asia has been experiencing a 'revival of identities', apparently confounding our assumptions that with the building of nation-states localized 'primordial' ties of kinship, ethnicity, language, and religion would shift to a nationalist, statist orientation. Economic development and integration were, of course, to be the material engines which enabled this shift. Such faith in the relationship between modernization and nationalism was based fundamentally upon the expectation that these 'primordial' ties were the result of cultural histories of spatial break and disjunction, that cultural diversity developed primarily through separation and isolation. As modern forces of integration bridged these spatial gaps, nations were to be born. However, this has apparently not happened, leading some to conclude that primordial ties cannot be smudged out by inauthentic, superficial modern identities. Hefner, on the other hand, has argued that rather than reflecting the survival of primordial sentiments, cultural revival is often *enabled* by the state and its command over the structures of political economy, and thus tradition is reconstituted in very new ways: "The circumstances that have breathed new life into 'old' identities are almost everywhere linked to a national and international political economy, the dimensions of which are quite new" (Hefner, 1987, page 493; see also Moore, 1989).

In this paper, I explore this connection between cultural revival and changing conditions of political economy in the context of tourism development among ethnic minority groups in Southwest China. I argue that cultural revival is, in part, a process of 'place creation' (often in the guise of a 'traditional place') in which identities may be consciously localized as a strategy to engage structures of political economy which increasingly connect local actors with broader geographical frameworks and more distant sources of power. Underlying this argument is a rejection of the naturalist perspective of cultural diversity as inherently threatened by a 'homogenizing' modernization (whether Maoist socialism, Dengist 'pragmatism', or flamboyant North American capitalist commercialism). The space in which cultures 'grow' need not be remote, bounded, and self-contained in order to achieve some quality of 'authenticity'. Cultural space, rather, is an interactive social construct. Culture, from this perspective, is constructed through connection and interaction along many geographical axes and scales. Its construction mediates the deterministic features of tradition—what is 'given'—with the necessities and possibilities of contemporary structures of political economy.

In broader terms, though, my goal is to explore one of presumably many paths towards an opening up of the discourse of historical materialism. For 'ethnic tribalism' is a political issue as much as a cultural one. In these terms, the argument presented here resonates with many aspects of what is increasingly identified as the postmodern paradigm. My focus on the local, on difference, and otherness, and my interrogation of 'cultural authenticity', all betray a commitment to the decentering of knowledge which postmodernism espouses. The reader will therefore recognize my debt to others whose work has been committed to the broadening of geographical inquiry, especially in terms of invigorating our conceptions of place, locality, and cultural politics (Massey, 1984; Pred, 1986; Cooke, 1989; Jackson, 1989; Gregory, 1991).

But the reader looking for a paper trumpeting the coming of a new paradigm will remain frustrated. 'Postmodern paradigm' strikes me as paradoxical, and I do not intend to argue that modernist Marxist analysis be replaced by some new discourse in which the voice of the Other is suddenly heard. The wariness of feminists regarding all the excitement over postmodernism has revealed the danger

of invigorating theory by the 'add Other and stir' approach (Moore, 1988; Deutsche, 1991; Massey, 1991). More at issue here, though, is my suspicion that by waving the banner of postmodernism we can truncate our interrogation of modernism itself. The argument presented below is about the process of modernization, something we still know little about, beyond the long-held assumptions outlined in the following section. I thus attempt to deepen our inquiry into the complexities of becoming modern (in this case, in China's ethnic periphery), rather than to explore the uncomfortable proposition that identity and culture have somehow gone beyond 'modern'. Historical materialist analysis is not rejected here, but is recognized as an inherently limited line of inquiry. I therefore propose a broadening of materialist theory in geography from its exclusive focus on a general process of capital flows toward more examination of the localized cultural encoding of that process. The importance of locality has, of course, been explored by others in various ways (see Alger, 1988; Cooke, 1989; Swyngedouw, 1989). Jackson (1991), moreover, has offered suggestions on how more adequately to address the cultural ramifications of these studies, bringing us closer to repairing the conceptual separation of the economic and the cultural.

Extending this critique, I wish to suggest that exploration of these cultural ramifications requires an altogether different conception of 'local place', one which is not oppositional to, say, 'global space'. The locality is not the political counterpoint to the global, not merely the 'refuge' of cultural politics which distract us from the grander conflicts of history; it is the evershifting and unstable stage we build to play out those grand and global conflicts themselves. It is not an extant refuge, a home for identity, as much as a stage built for contesting identities, and thus a stage from which meaningful change can be realized. The terms 'locality', 'local resistance', 'localized struggles', and 'local knowledge' continue to be tossed about with much abandon, and this seems to bespeak a more general problem in our conceptions of space and its relation to culture. That is, there has been a tendency to assume that cultural and economic phenomena exist in different, even oppositional, spatial worlds, conveniently thought of as local and global.

In what follows, then, I shall first explore the distinctions between conceptions of 'traditional local place' and 'modernized global space' as represented by historical materialism. Tracing the historical development of these ideas, I will point out that the continued reinforcing of a conceptual separation of the local and the global inherent in contemporary Marxist analysis reflects a significant debt to 19th century naturalist social theory, as well as a persistence in separating the cultural from the economic. Ethnic tourism development in China will then be analyzed in an effort to illustrate the way cultural identities are actively localized and made meaningful not by rejecting intrusive structures of political economy, but by consciously engaging them, appropriating what space is available within them and calling it 'local'. The locality is not a primordial 'given', but must be built with the tools made available by both received 'tradition' and contemporary forces of political economy. This approach to cultural revival is necessary, I argue, if we are theoretically to link 'localized identity' with 'global structures' without reducing the structures to economics and the identity to a cultural response.

Before we move on, however, two important conceptual issues must be addressed. The first concerns tourism as a satisfactory subject in assessing flows of political economy and their relation to cultural construction. Britton (1991) has made a conclusive argument for treating tourism as an important avenue of capital accumulation, and thus a dominant player in the global political economy.

Significantly, in China tourism is promoted for precisely this reason; it has become an important component of economic reforms designed to introduce market mechanisms and encourage regional specialization (Wang, 1985; Liao, 1986).

- ✓ Tourism is at the same time a profound cultural phenomenon (MacCannell, 1989; Smith V, 1989), and has been shown to play an important role in the ongoing
- ✓ process of cultural construction in touristized areas (van den Berghe and Keyes, 1984; Cohen, 1988).

The second conceptual issue concerns connecting the fixity of the state with the fluidity of a global political economy, for the Chinese state will play a central role in my illustration. The Chinese state is "*the* arbitrator of relations among producers, marketers, and consumers in China's ethnic tourism" (Swain, 1990, page 29, emphasis in original); it provides the framework in which all cultural-economic interaction is carried out. But this should not divert our attention from the fact that the Chinese state plays the same role as other states whose control (or attempted control) over flows of political economy have conditioned and enabled localized expressions of cultural difference (see Hefner, 1987; Moore, 1989). In China, the state is the purveyor of and filter for modernization, and although we may call its brand socialist, it rests on the same assumptions (the breaking down of localist bonds and identities) and is worked with the same tools (economic development, market expansion, resource exploitation) as in the West. As Rofel (1992, page 106) comments, "The Chinese state aspires and claims to enact a faithful reproduction of Western modernity", it subscribes to the "universal efficacy of science, progress, and rationality" (page 95), and adopts 'capitalist' techniques in its pursuit of profit and accumulation. Yet, as she argues, and as I illustrate here, the Chinese state's 'interweavings' into the global political economy have not erased local history or prevented human agency from turning modernity into contested terrain. She in fact argues that new spaces of subversion have been opened up in this process. For contemporary Marxists, the state appears as a necessary component in mediating uneven capital accumulation and for promoting modernization. The Chinese state can certainly be seen in these terms, and hence can be incorporated into a broader theoretical critique of Marxist methods.

The limits to Marx

Holes in the walls, spaces of identity, and autonomy

- ✓ The realization of a need for alternative approaches to theorizing the cultural and economic constitution of space came about through my attempts to explain ethnic tourism developments in China in strictly Marxist terms. In these terms, one would expect the process of ethnic cultural commodification (the rationalized production of ethnic material culture for the tourist market) to have the effect of breaking down the traditional distinctions (that is, the boundaries) which make for diverse cultural landscapes. Modernization, and all its homogenizing cultural effects, would
- ✓ essentially be introduced into peripheral regions by unleashing capital to go about its own annihilating logic, creating a 'space of flows' presumably to replace a previous, more traditional 'space of places', communities, and local knowledge (Henderson and Castells, 1987, page 7). I have since become convinced that this is
- ✓ not the case at all, that modernization is not simply the result of the process of capital accumulation and all its sociocultural spin-offs, that capital does not "annihilate space through time" (Harvey, 1989), and that modernity does not constitute a unified set of practices (see Rofel, 1992). The social spaces of modernity are as much cultural as economic constructs. Only by seeing them as such do we begin to see them actually inhabited by real people capable of diverting the flow of history and wreaking havoc on the structures of power which weigh them down.

Swain (1990, page 29) has noted that, "For indigenous groups in China, ethnic tourism reinforces their separateness from the majority while integrating them into the state economy". She goes on to point out that the state sees ethnic tourism as a temporary phenomenon, an opportunity to raise some cash before modernization sweeps clean the exoticism of the periphery. Yet there is reason to question the state's confidence. To understand the paradoxical simultaneity of reinforcing cultural separateness while achieving economic integration requires more explanation than the narrow strictures of historical materialism have offered thus far. In their refusal to regard cultural inputs into this process as little more than meaningful reflections of varying modes of production and capital accumulation, Marxists (see Wallerstein, 1979; Smith N, 1984; Harvey, 1985; Taylor, 1985; Soja, 1989) must explain Swain's reinforced separateness exclusively as the cultural outcome of exploitative and alienating structures imposed on locals 'from above'. In this sense, separation keeps groups divided, stifles united resistance, and perpetuates structural exploitation.

Certainly, this gives us valuable insight, and I would not deny the significance of such an analysis; indeed, it has been a hallmark of my own theoretical commitments. It is nevertheless incomplete. True, contemporary cultural construction can be thought of as the localized reinforcement of separateness. It may indeed perpetuate, in some cases, social inequalities. In controlling the means of production, distribution, and accumulation, the ability of more powerful social groups (in this case represented by the Chinese state) to isolate subordinate groups in a socially constructed space is very real. But the walls we build to separate are nevertheless riddled with holes, through which individual actors continually pass; tactics of autonomy are realized, and ideas, products, and other integrative phenomena continually flow. By focusing on the holes (others have called them gaps, margins, shadows, and silences) we are able to challenge the assumptions that modernism spreads at the expense of a 'premodern' cultural diversity, that commercialized culture is entirely inauthentic and alienated, and that historical change grinds away along a single trajectory of unilinear development. It allows us to recognize marginalized ethnic groups, the 'objects of the tourist's gaze', as active participants in mediating the tension between state-promoted commercial logic and cultural integrity. Last, it allows us to see separation as being not merely imposed on subordinate groups, but also as a cultural strategy demonstrating individual agency and its continual reconstitution of the state-controlled structures of political economy.

Again, I do not wish to suggest here that state-imposed structures of commercial production which serve to integrate local identities within an increasingly national and international political economy are somehow less powerful than Marxists would have us think they are. Certainly they are powerful. My point is, rather, to argue that cultural construction is so intimately bound up within this process that it cannot be conceptually separated as a 'response', and that it *maintains* spaces of autonomy and identity by appropriating what was there before and what is newly offered.

Modernism: imagining spatial disjuncture

To understand adequately the debilitating way that much of Marxism has generally conceived of space we need briefly to explore modernist representations of space, in reference specifically to culture, as they developed during the 19th century. The focus here is on the commonly held idea that modernization (in the form of a fluid, though often state-regulated, process of capital accumulation) was breaking down the space of authentic places, leaving in its wake a homogenized landscape in which place-based identities were artificially and inauthentically constructed.

MacCannell (1989, page 3) has commented that,

"The progress of modernity ... depends on its very sense of instability and inauthenticity. For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles. In other words, the concerns of moderns for 'naturalness', their nostalgia and search for authenticity are ... components of the conquering spirit of modernity—the grounds of its unifying consciousness."

Modernism is a "technocentric and rationalistic stance toward the world" which espouses a break with tradition—"its dependent and relational 'Other' (Rofel, 1992, page 94). As a cultural condition, modernism defines itself in largely negative terms, as everything which an assumed natural world is not. An imagined, traditional, and authentic cultural place becomes the benchmark from which to evaluate the progress of modern society. Ironically, that authentic place cannot really be destroyed or annihilated by modernity, but must be continually reconstructed at the margins of modern society, thereby "rendering concrete and immediate that which modernity is not" (MacCannell, 1989, page 9).

The turn to a natural sense of place in modern social theory developed during the 19th century as a critique of the Enlightenment claims to a universal spatial and temporal rationality upon which progressive civilization grows. Williams (1973; 1977) characterized this critique as part of a growing consciousness of the changes wrought by a rapidly developing industrial society. There was a tension between, on the one hand, the increasingly mechanistic and alienating qualities of Enlightenment rationality, as typified by industrialism, and, on the other hand, the uncomfortable sense that this was nevertheless 'progressive'. "In one view this process was part of the continuing development of civilization: a new and higher social order. But in another view civilization was the achieved state which these developments were threatening to destroy" (Williams, 1977, page 15). Tönnies (1957) resolved this tension by polarizing the world into authentic and inauthentic realms. *Gemeinschaft* was portrayed as the 'natural' state of human society, being eroded by *Gesellschaft*, which, based on larger-scale industrialism, was artificial, inauthentic, and corrupting.

The important feature of the *Gemeinschaft*-*Gesellschaft* distinction is not so much the opposite worlds each term represents in any objective sense, but that one cannot be understood without the other. They are intimately related, on a conceptual level, by an antagonistic tension; they are part of a single state of mind which praises progress by eulogizing tradition. The 'community' cannot be labeled as such until it is threatened by a larger 'society'. Here we may be reminded of Tuan's (1974, page 112) insightful comment that once wilderness—the most pure form of nature—is ironically preserved by modern society, it ceases to be true wilderness; "true wilderness exists only in the great sprawling cities". In other words, nature captured is more a state of mind than an objective reality. *Gemeinschaft* served its purpose for Tönnies not as a real place which faced extinction, but as a pure state of mind with which to evaluate modernity, a metaphorical pole upon which to ground modernity's progressive instability.

Much of Williams's work involved exploring the construction of the natural and pastoral images as aesthetic foils for British rural-intellectual radicals to duel with, but not seriously to challenge, modernity. Artists and writers of the 19th century sought to "evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the times" by idealizing the 'pastoral' and 'counterpastoral' (Williams, 1973, pages 13-34, and page 45). Williams identified this as a particular "structure of feeling" which defined 'pastoral' in terms of the eminent loss of it; something was changing and the poet had to record the experience. 'Pastoral' itself took on a meaning which privileged the metropolitan's need for some beautiful place. "Its most serious element was a

renewed intensity of attention to natural beauty, but this is now the nature of observation, of the scientist or the tourist, rather than the working countryman" (Williams, 1973, page 20).

Barrell has illustrated the masterful construction of this pastoral metaphor in the language of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. He explores the local geographies of Hardy's characters as oppositional to the wider geography of the narrator. Hardy's narrators, who approach and explain rural Wessex, serving as the reader's familiar eye, play the crucial role of providing the framework with which to know the pastoral. To know it at all, for Hardy, is to threaten it, to capture it. Tess Derbyfield's personal, localized geography cannot even be written until the narrator arrives to provide a wider, delocalized viewpoint from which to 'see' it. This is reflected by Tess's own coming of age; she is not 'known' until she is violated (Barrell, 1982, page 360):

"The traveller can certainly attempt to point his consciousness on Tess, so that Blackmoor, 'an engirdled and secluded region' at the start of the novel, 'for the most part untrodden as yet by the tourist and the landscape-painter' will be trodden, penetrated (as Tess, the bird, is 'trodden' and penetrated by Alec D'Urberville) and inscribed in the list of the traveller's other conquests."

Hardy's commitment to capturing the loss of country, which acutely preoccupied 19th century England as it does today, reveals the metaphorical sophistication with which a conquered (or conquerable, but never completely lost) nature was constructed by intellectuals.

Literature and art were only part of that construction project. An understanding of Hardy's 'nature of observation' gives us an appreciation for the dominant role played by the natural sciences in conceiving an objective reality which was in fact natural, a reality quite different from and equally threatened by Tönnies's *Gesellschaft*. This meant an understanding of the natural world in which its relationship to the human, social world was emphasized. During the course of the 19th century the dominant intellectual trend was thus one of a gradual rejection of a human-nature separation (Norton, 1989, page 11). Darwin provided the most comprehensive framework for linking the human and natural world. Evolutionary theory was a systematic ordering of nature and humanity under uniform rules, and it found immediate appeal among social scientists grappling with an evaluation of modernism (Tylor, 1871; Morgan, 1877; Engels, 1884). Darwin's theories were powerful in that they not only connected humans to nature, but also could be extrapolated to explain humanity's increasing *alienation* from nature. Therein lay the basis not only for Europe's progressiveness, but also for its loss. It seemed reasonable to conclude from Darwin's basic principles that Western civilization represented the apogee of evolution (see Rifkin, 1983, pages 63-108). The empiricist foundations for natural science research made it logical to assume that evolution, being a 'natural' process, applied with equal objectivity to all peoples.

Along with the explanation of different peoples in evolutionary terms of uniform historical development went an equally powerful spatial metaphor. Hardy's Wessex needed to be constructed as a particular *place*, a place experiencing its final days of isolation before being 'trodden' by modernity's tireless march. Wilmsen's (1989, page 8) portrayal of the anthropological project is, not surprisingly, similar: "Anthropologists ... have made a virtue of what they perceive to be the isolation necessary to preserve the integrity of ... cultures". Appadurai (1986, page 337) has noted as well that, "The science of the other has inescapably been tied to the journey elsewhere". It is not difficult to trace the conceptual journeys of space and place in their appropriation by naturalist and evolutionist social theory. The colonial domains of the Western powers offered a vast array of primitive places,

natural laboratories of ancient culture and society, which had maintained varying degrees of integrity because of their isolation from the 'civilized' world (see Norton, 1989, pages 27-44). As part of modernity's self-conscious and melancholy evaluation of progress, 'local place' itself became the very essence of what modernism was not. It was separate, bounded, isolated. The local place was conceptualized as a sort of petri dish where culture grew like mold or bacteria. The isolation thought of as necessary for producing authentic cultural diversity was a reasonable extension of the natural science laboratory in which isolation was the key to experimentation and thus systematic knowledge. The role of the laboratory as a way of knowing was abstracted and universalized as an explanation for cultural diversity, what Fabian (1983) called "culture gardens".

What is especially significant here is the degree to which these assumptions about culture and isolation have been reproduced in China as the state casts its gaze on its peripheral ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities play an important role in social science research which in China serves to legitimize the state's brand of Marxism and the 'stages of history' approach (when Engels borrowed from Morgan and Tylor) upon which the faith in 'socialist modernization' depends. Ethnic groups are thus studied as 'living fossils' (Yan, 1988). Their ways of life are reconstructed by the state's ethnic identification (*minzu shibie*) project as part of the reproduction of primitivism at the peripheries of modern (Han Chinese) society (see Harrell, 1993).

The assumption of a natural place superseded by a modern space has recently received much criticism from cultural theorists. Gupta and Ferguson (1992, page 6) have perceptively observed that, "Representations of space in the social sciences are remarkably dependent on images of break, rupture, and disjunction... The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies". The idea that cultural diversity could be explained by some kind of crude geographical determinism has long been dismissed by anthropologists and geographers alike, but only recently have there been significant explorations of the spatial implications of the intersections between culture and political economy. For example, Feierman has argued [along with Wilmsen (1989) and a growing number of others] that European intellectuals and colonial administrators shared idealistic assumptions regarding bounded cultural space, creating for administrative purposes discretely mappable 'tribes' which were assumed to have always existed as part of a premodern cultural stasis stretching back into the Stone Age. "Tanganyika's government needed to find 'tribal' groups with clear boundaries for administrative purposes; the functionalist anthropologists tended to study bounded tribes" (Feierman, 1990, page 136). Thus was the place of the premodern primitive constructed. Feierman makes explicit the connection between modernity's conquering spirit and its simultaneous construction of, and thus control over, the conquered. Not surprisingly, similar conclusions are drawn by scholars focusing on China, where the state has inherited the 'civilizing project' of empire and has recast it in the mold of scientific, rational, socialist modernization (Harrell, 1993). Spatial break, rupture, and disjunction in social science are seen here to perpetuate not only the misappropriated ideals of natural science and evolutionism, but also the social relations of power by insisting that separation rather than connection is the source of difference. "The presumption that spaces are autonomous has enabled the power of topography to successfully conceal the topography of power" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, page 8).

Marxist idealism

It is striking the degree to which contemporary neo-Marxism reproduces this legacy of idealistic spatial disjunction in its preoccupation with structural annihilation by capital of (implicitly traditional) place (see Castells, 1983; Jameson, 1984; Soja, 1985; Taylor, 1985; Storper and Walker, 1989). Harvey (1989, pages 238–39) exemplifies this preoccupation:

“Capital, in short, continues to dominate, and it does so in part through superior command of space and time... The ‘otherness’ and ‘regional resistance’ that postmodernist politics emphasizes can flourish in a particular place. But they are all too often subject to the power of capital over the co-ordination of universal fragmented space and the march of capitalism’s global historical time that lies outside the purview of any particular one of them... Time and space both get defined through the organization of social practices fundamental to commodity production.”

Harvey is not, of course, arguing that the areal diversity of sociocultural practice will disappear. On the contrary, neo-Marxist geography has made great contributions in theorizing how global economic interaction stimulates social differentiation. Yet, as Entrikin (1991, page 47) points out, neo-Marxists see localized culture as a residual: “Local or regional consciousness, or, more generally culture, is seen as derivative of the functional specialization created by the economy”. Underlying this evocation of the sweeping power of capital lies the assumption of a fundamental distinction between a ‘particular place’ and ‘universal space’. The former remains the realm of cultural difference (as well as many Other kinds of difference), whereas the latter is political and economic, the realm of national and international flows of accumulation and commodity production. Along these lines, then, modernity–capital is fundamentally destabilizing to our senses of identity as it has no respect for particular places. The cultural ‘response’ is to latch on to self-consciously produced ‘places’ which remind us of the traditions and communities which have since been ripped into and torn asunder by the process of capital accumulation. The result is ‘interplace competition’ leading to the “production of more variegated spaces with the increasing homogeneity of international exchange” (Harvey, 1989, page 295). These collections of commodified tradition are inauthentic, monotonous, and “identical in ambiance from city to city”. Or, in presumably the wrong hands, they can represent grave geopolitical dangers. As one detractor comments, the proponents of the world’s “Lebanonization” are “people without countries, inhabiting nations not their own, seeking smaller worlds within borders that will seal them off from modernity” (Barber, 1992, page 60). They want, apparently, escape from “McWorld”; they want the old communities which global capital has taken away.

Similarly, Watts (1991, pages 10–11), echoing the sentiments of many, comments that, “There has been an erosion of the spatially-circumscribed homeland or community and a compensatory growth of the imaginary home-land from afar”. In claiming that “the old identity between people and places” has disappeared, there is surprisingly little historical analysis to support such confidence in the universal progress of modernity. It is the same kind of confidence upon which the Chinese state depends, as it promotes ethnic tourism development while at the same time counting on the inevitable breakdown of primordial cultural identities. But when was the old community ever ‘spatially circumscribed’? The recent work of Feierman (1990), Siu and Faure (forthcoming), Wilmsen (1989), and others, suggests that we cannot so easily assume such a ‘premodern’ state of unproblematic identity.

The historical materialist approach, in short, rests its claims to a universalized space (defined by capital and commodity flows) on the same idealistic spatial conceptions which 19th century modernists developed in constructing an oppositional

'natural' place of primitive tradition. Neo-Marxists use the same logic as Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1970), relegating culture to the ephemeral wanderings of bourgeois consciousness, thereby devaluing it as an active force in the continuing production and meaningful places and identities. Williams's (1973, page 303) discussion of this devaluing leads us to realize that, in fact, many idealistic attitudes were from the beginning incorporated into the Marxist critique of capital:

"Implicit in the denunciation [of the tearing process of capitalism and imperialism] was another set of value-judgements: the bourgeoisie had 'rescued' a considerable part of the population from the 'idiocy of rural life'; the subjected nations were 'barbarian and semi-barbarian', the dominating powers 'civilized'. It was then on this kind of confidence in the singular values of modernization and civilization that a major distortion in the history of communism was erected."

If correcting this distortion means repairing the conceptual separation between the cultural and the economic, then an equally important reevaluation of space, as I have been suggesting, seems necessary as well.

The 'reevaluation of space' is itself a rather unexceptional argument., Authors of locality studies (see Massey, 1984; Cooke, 1989), for example, have long been involved in this process. Their work has offered intriguing—if not highly debated (Duncan and Savage, 1989)—new ways of understanding locality as a stage of active and meaningful engagement with the forces of economic restructuring. But, as Jackson (1991, page 216) has made clear, the locality studies project ultimately falls into the neo-Marxist trap of economic reductionism: "Although they have produced some tantalizing insights, they were prevented from taking the analysis further by an artificial separation between the 'economic' and the 'cultural'."

Broadening the materialist inquiry: the political economy of cultural construction in China

In the remainder of the paper, I illustrate some possible ways of rethinking the materialist conceptions of modern space in relation to culture. In viewing 'local culture' as an interactive social construct, I outline the political economy of cultural construction, and highlight the ability of people, throughout history, to carve out spaces of identity with the tools provided by the state, the purveyor of broader integrative processes.

I therefore begin by reaffirming the central historical role of the Chinese state in providing an integrative structure through which local identities have been reconstituted. This establishes the appropriate context with which to understand how state-sponsored ethnic tourism development continues this process and how the commercialism inherent in this development, rather than the breaking down of local identities, may enable people to reconstruct them as it connects them to an increasingly global political economy. The importance of this lies, I believe, not so much in legitimizing tourism as an appropriate form of development, but in a broader project of illuminating those 'holes in the walls' of separation, walls which ethnic tourism both reinforces and breaks down. In what ways, in other words, can we think of contemporary cultural construction, which engages the integrative nature of commodity production, as being part of an ongoing reconstitution and reassertion of place identity? Can ethnic tourism, as a component of integrative modernization, be thought of as simply another process through which individual actors continually reconstruct a localized identity?

The following illustration is intended as a preliminary evaluation of these ideas. Admittedly, although some of China's ethnic regions are experiencing unprecedented exposure to the forces of capital, it would be wrong to claim that a full-blown commercial economy has been unleashed in China's periphery. Rather, modernization in China is carried out in a still-highly-controlled system of distribution and exchange.

The state's role is thus central to any analysis of change. But if recent developments are any indication of what is to come, as the state becomes pressured by the increasingly fluid stream of economic structures which more directly affect China's ethnic regions, there is little reason to assume that meaningful localized culture will cease to exist. Instead, what we seem to be witnessing is the ongoing process whereby local identities redefine themselves, as "linkages between local society and the wider world" (Feierman, 1990, page 36) are realigned and reshaped.

Localized ritual practice and the Chinese state

Siu has noted that in South China, traditions are today being reconstituted as part of the changing interaction between the socialist state and local ritual practices rather than indicating a growing gap between the state and popular culture. She maintains that "the rituals today are reconstituted by a different cast of performers and the process reproduces a much transformed rural society in which the power of the socialist state has long been taken for granted" (Siu, 1989, page 123). Documenting a clear generational difference in attitudes about and performance of funeral and wedding rituals, she argues that traditions are revived in a contemporary context for very contemporary reasons. In a climate of a politically powerful yet insecure and increasingly ineffectual party state, the creation of informal networks is important for minimizing the conspicuousness that acting outside of state channels (which is tolerated if not wholly endorsed) may bring. Rituals provide important opportunities for such networking. Staging elaborate rituals may also offer needed outlets for accumulated wealth which has little use-value in and of itself. Most importantly, though, rituals may serve to ground securely one's identity within a local framework of action. Rituals are visible, external expressions over which locals can maintain a sense of control; the gestalt socialist state offers few such opportunities to ground one's identity. In this sense, rituals are localizing performances operating in a much broader socialist state within which identities are contested (see Billeter, 1985).

Importantly, though, the state itself has created the conditions for the particular nature of the revival of ritual in South China. Siu argues that whereas in Hong Kong and Taiwan market economy forces have played the major role in transforming ritual practice, it has been the socialist state and its virtual monopoly on allocation and distribution of resources which has generated this transformation in the People's Republic of China. Rituals have been reconstituted within a totally different social setting than existed a century ago, and their 'revival' as actual expressions of cultural construction cannot be divorced from this contemporary social setting. They cannot, in other words, be separated from the state-manipulated political economy which has conditioned them.

Regarding Hui Muslims of Fujian, Gladney has documented a similar example of revival. Here, the renovation of historical tombs is carried out not simply as an expression of ethnoreligious loyalties to ancestors, but as part of establishing economic links to a larger international network of Muslim power. Rather than being bypassed, the state is intimately involved in this process. It pays for large-scale renovations and promotes them for tourists, many of which are Hui from throughout China. The returns for this investment are quite visible: Kuwaiti funds helped to build an international airport at Xiamen in 1980, and five years later Kuwaitis initiated a hydroelectric project near Fuzhou (Gladney, 1987, page 498). In this case, ethnic and religious revivals are encouraged in part by state grants, propaganda efforts, and official recognition that, as was the case in imperial times, local cultural activity may cultivate a "symbiotic relationship with the state culture", rather than a necessarily oppositional one (Siu, 1989, page 122; see also Rawski, 1985;

Watson, 1988). Were local cultural practices 'naturally' bound to some extant locality, the overarching state, as purveyor of an integrating system, would clearly be a threat. Yet this does not appear to be the case.

Looking back over two thousand years, Hawkes (1985, pages 64-66) has made similar observations regarding the ancient Confucian co-opting of the marginal 'dragon boat' rituals of South China. By turning what were seen as pagan fertility rites into state-promoted Confucian offerings, imperial officials avoided having to suppress local rituals which could be interpreted as circumventing the state's official pantheon of deities. This provided locals with a structure within which to operate, to maintain their autonomy in performing the ritual (which has since become popular throughout southern China), while at the same time integrating themselves into the overarching state orthodoxy.

Watson has examined the relationships between local cultural practices and imperial state culture in greater detail in his study of the Tian Hou cults along the South China coast over the past millennium. His analysis is significant in that he outlines numerous situations in which ritual expressions of local autonomy and identity did not inherently reject the legitimacy of imperial control and integration. Rather, the imperial state co-opted and standardized local culture itself, providing a structure within which locals could act in order to appear 'civilized' or at least in political alignment with the state. "The actual organization of temple cults devolved to local elites who had a vested interest in maintaining good relations with state officials. The system was flexible enough to allow people at all levels of the social hierarchy to construct their own representations of state approved deities" (Watson, 1985, page 323). The point here is that local cultural construction involved an active engagement with broader structures of political economic power. Cultural variations within China's vastly diverse territorial space did not represent weakpoints or 'holes' in the imperial state's pervasive enforcement of orthodoxy as much as the negotiated interaction between people representing local interests and those representing broader imperial interests. Distinctive cultural spaces were maintained, in other words, through connections rather than disjunctions.

Ethnic tourism development in Southwest China

Siu's argument, and especially Gladney's example, thus suggest some similarities between this historical 'symbiosis' which allowed for local place-creation within a larger integrative framework, and contemporary cultural revivals witnessed during the past decade of the post-Mao era. These "reconstitutions of tradition" are strategies "for coping with contemporary existence defined by the socialist state" (Siu, 1989, page 122) in its control over political economy, much in the same way that earlier local cults attempted to maintain their delicate balance between autonomy and integration. As the above studies indicate, local identity was always a contested domain, rather than a natural given.

Among ethnic groups in China, the burgeoning development of tourism as a state-sponsored form of economic integration may be providing, in certain cases, a similar kind of 'overarching structure' of connection through which local cultural identity may be maintained or contested. Although most research on contemporary ethnic culture and identity in China has been focused on the centrality of the state in the process of cultural construction and the redefinition of ethnic space (Heberer, 1989; Hsieh, 1989; Harrell, 1990), the study of tourism offers a means to approach the increasingly important role of commercialism and commodification in this process (see Cohen, 1988). This is significant in that it links local ethnic identities to a national and international network of capital accumulation and commodity production. It potentially opens up a space of identity in which, *through* their

increased integration, locals may effectively maintain a sense of autonomy despite the state's ideological efforts to bring about 'socialist modernization' against which many local traditions are still posed as 'unhealthy'.

It is well known that under Deng Xiaoping, modernization replaced ideological rectitude and socialist collectivization as the officially promoted means for transforming Chinese society [although Anagnost (1989) points out that ideology remains a dominant feature of the state's modernization program]. Peripheral ethnic regions are now valued more for their exploitable natural resources than for the potential of achieving sociocultural and ideological unity (Cannon, 1989). Undeveloped regions are encouraged to commoditize whatever specialities they have to offer (such as cash crops, handicrafts, and scenery) as part of the mid-1980s turn toward recognizing interregional comparative advantages (Su, 1987; Cannon and Kirkby, 1989, page 6). One of these resource advantages is the 'exotic' culture of many ethnic groups. There has been considerable recent documentation of numerous ethnic groups reviving and reinventing, with state encouragement, a localized exotic cultural tradition as part of a developing tourist commodity economy. The challenge is to examine this revival as a contemporary reconstitution, as an expression of meaningful local autonomy and engagement with broader forces of political economy.

The Southwest province of Guizhou offers a region in which to explore this challenge. Other than its famed Huangguoshu Falls (China's largest falls), Guizhou's tourist sites have only recently been the focus of development efforts. But, in the more established scenic sites around Anshun, ethnic villages have already become thriving experiments in commercialized cultural production. Ethnic batiks, embroidered cloth, musical instruments and other handicrafts, quaint architecture, public rituals, and other cultural events have all become valuable as 'local specialties' ripe for entering China's fledgling commercial marketplace. As Swain (1989; 1990) has similarly documented for the Sani of the Stone Forest region in Yunnan, many of the locals in this region have benefited from these developments as producers and active marketers of a valuable commodity: their exotic cultural landscape. The state's promotion of such specialization, which in fact targets the international market more than the domestic, represents the intersection between the political economy of capital accumulation and localized cultural construction.

The provincial capital of Guiyang has become a destination hub from which tourists may now explore much of the province. Between 1987 and 1988 the number of (international and domestic) visitors there increased by 198.9%, the largest increase in tourism of any major city in China (SSB, 1989, page 563). Comparatively, Guiyang's numbers remain very small, but their sharp increase is indicative of the provincial government's changing attitude. It has realized that tourism can be a vital component of a commercial economy (GPTB, 1988). In this regard, ethnic regions have received special attention (Lu, 1989), as ethnic commodities and tourist development have proven to complement each other so well. In 1986 the Provincial Nationality Affairs Commission and the State Tourist Bureau began officially cooperating on developing ethnic cultural production for tourist consumption (GPRCC, 1987, page 544). Ethnic tourism is seen as having both economic and propaganda benefits for Guizhou. For domestic tourists, it encourages investment from other provinces in ethnic commodity production. For foreign tourists, it generates precious foreign exchange and opportunities for investment and joint-venture proposals. According to Deputy Minister Rong Mu of the State Tourist Bureau on a 1986 visit to Guizhou, tourism can also propagandize the multinational unity and stability of China (GPRCC, 1987, page 838). Indeed, China likes to present itself as a model for other multinational countries which face centrifugal forces of ethnic nationalism. Provincial officials stress the importance of

attracting outside capital in exploiting Guizhou's resources, and recognize tourism as an important vehicle in this project (GPNAC, 1988). Thus, a space is opened for unique cultures to develop as tourist attractions.

What needs to be recognized, however, is that, as tourist attractions, locals are not necessarily isolated or bound to their places of tradition, only to be exploited and put on display for the tourist's experience. Rather, local culture is reworked according to the links which have been made (in large part by the state) and along which new inputs will be carried.

In the southeast Guizhou autonomous region of Qiandongnan, tourist development has been focused on the combination of natural beauty and local ethnic color (KLRCC, 1987, page 59). Focal sites include Xijiang village (a 'natural museum' of traditional Miao lifestyle), and the ornate drum towers and bamboo villages of the Dong in Liping and Congjiang counties. Xijiang village has been the focus of much attention as a model in several respects. Emphasis has been put on preserving a 'traditional' Miao village, and the area has received RMB (Renminbi) ¥500 000 in state subsidies for building reservoirs, pipelines, small hydroelectric stations, and, of course, tourist facilities (Peng, 1984). In 1988 Liping and Congjiang counties were still officially 'closed' to foreign tourists. In Guiyang, a foreign affairs official told me they were 'too poor' to accommodate foreign guests, a plausible enough explanation. Yet an agent at the Provincial Travel Bureau indicated that the only reason poverty was relevant was that many of the 'traditional' Dong structures remained in disrepair and locals could not afford to put on extravagant rituals which tourists could observe. They had not the wealth, in other words, to reconstruct a tradition for tourist consumption. Far from threatening a traditional landscape, modernization was awaited as the impetus for building what outsiders expected to be there.

This leads us to examine the cultural intersections with the political economy of tourism which I have thus far outlined. As documented by Schein (1989), tourism plays a crucial role in reconstituting a 'primitive' and exotic cultural space in Qiandongnan. After early visits to Qiandongnan's Miao villages, foreign and domestic tourists alike "expressed disappointment that no villagers were to be seen wearing embroidered clothing or silver headdresses" (Schein, 1989, page 201). In some villages (such as Xijiang), repetition of tourist activities reifies cultural practices in what is seen as a traditional form. For the tourists, such reification naturally appears authentic: Schein (1989, page 202) observed that, "Tourists wrote such entries in the guest book as 'I hope you keep this old life-style for many years and don't change it with the tourist customs'". But for Schein, tourism is only part of a general development process of commercialism, which is affecting Miao culture throughout Guizhou in a positive way. Numerous festivals are returning, Miao language is spreading in use, and research in Miao tradition has increased. Much of this is possible because of increased wealth in the countryside; many peasants have more money to spend on festivals and rituals. Schein argues that post-Mao cultural policy has created a dualism between localized activity and initiatives on the one hand (the inscribing of cultural meaning on increasingly commercial activity), and state sponsorship and encouragement of selected activities on the other. Thus, even in the form of 'reified tradition', cultural revival is very real, and often tourism development can be appropriated by local groups in asserting their autonomy within larger, more dominant systems (see Wood, 1984).

Schein discusses two reconstituted rituals, both of which, though quite different from their traditional predecessors, maintain their role as 'localizing' performances within broader frameworks of power. *Zhaolong*, 'calling the dragons', is a tree-planting ritual in which dragons are called on to protect the new trees and, hence,

the village. What was previously a 'feudal superstition' now resonates quite well with state-sponsored reforestation campaigns. Here, she captures both the new utilitarian materialist motivations for *zhaolong* as well as its continuing 'talismanic' nature (Schein, 1989, pages 205-206):

"Lumber has been an important industry in Qiandongnan and in recent years deforestation has become a matter of serious concern in the region. With de-collectivization, the uncultivated land around villages was also divided into household plots and it is forbidden to cut firewood at random... The tree planting part of the *zhaolong* ceremony indeed bears much in common with other government-sponsored tree-planting movements dedicated to reforestation. But, as these young people explained, *zhaolong* is an even more effective way to inculcate conservation consciousness for no one would dare cut down the trees once they have been made sacred through the ritual."

This further illustrates Siu's point that localist cultural revival does not necessarily set itself in opposition to a broader system of control, but engages it and makes it meaningful, while building a stage for local identity and action.

Longchuan jie ('Dragon Boat Festival'), unlike *zhalong*, is a very large-scale event which attracts many tourists and presents an opportunity for the marketing of ethnic exoticism in commodity form. Outsiders are clearly targeted in this commercial exchange. But, importantly, the event also maintains its role as a courtship opportunity for young Miao. Now, however, instead of the traditional dialogue singing which the tourists see performed during the day, young people at night play taped Miao songs or popular Chinese music on cassette recorders, and boys pursue not a vocal dialogue with a girl, but her tape. Schein comments that, "this contemporary twist on courtship song is an example of a new type of cultural production which affirms and entrenches the older form at the same time as transforming it (Schein, 1989, page 209). Miao cultural revival can thus be seen as part of a general process in



Three Dai novice monks shooting pool at a cultural center in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan.

which state sponsorship (reforestation campaigns and encouraging commodity production) provides an overarching framework within which locals may act and create place-based identities.

Outside of Guizhou, Wu (1990) offers another example of this place-based cultural construction in which increasingly distant links of economic interaction are incorporated into local identities. He contrasts Bai identity in the tourist site of Dali in Yunnan to outlying villages which have not been targets of tourism. The 'rediscovery' of Bai cultural traditions in Dali has only occurred in response to dramatic altering of political economy relationships in Dali between locals, state officials, and tourists. Tourism has exploded in Dali since the area was 'opened' in 1984. Local entrepreneurs have for the most part kept pace with its developments. The proportion of restaurants and shops which are privately owned has increased even as the number of tourists has expanded, and 90% of the people involved in the tourist economy are from the local area (Gormsen, 1990, page 133). Tourist revenues and state promotions of distinctive cultural expressions work together to enable the construction of a localized Bai identity. However, in outlying areas, Wu documents, few really think of themselves as Bai in contemporary terms. As one of these villagers commented, "Our language, our culture, and the way we eat and dress are all the same as the Han. We definitely feel we are Han. However, because our ancestors are Bai we declared ourselves on paper as *Baizu*" (cited in Wu, 1990, page 7).

The question of 'local control' over the political economy interactions, which tourism facilitates, remains of crucial importance. Local identities are clearly being reconstituted as part of these interactions. But the extent to which local groups can maintain sufficient agency to influence the nature of these interactions to their benefit will determine whether a changing political economy can be effectively appropriated in constructing meaningful, localized 'space of autonomy'. Nevertheless, I would argue that this possibility deserves a place in our theoretical approaches to the spatial constitution of culture and political economy. I have tried to indicate the value of linking cultural construction with the broader, structural framework of state control over material production and distribution, but the critical point is that we need to account adequately for the way in which meaning links human agency with structure without subordinating the actors to the status of messengers of economic logic. "Instead, cultural concerns enter into economic interests and political strategies to determine viable options" (Siu and Faure, forthcoming, page 22), albeit often in highly unfavorable conditions.

Conclusions: when was identity not confusing?

Ethnic tourism in China is officially regarded as a temporary development phenomenon, because as minority cultures modernize, they are expected to assimilate to 'more advanced' Han (socialist) ways. Such faith in a universalized historical trajectory allows no room for conceptualizing the active participation of individuals who might be consciously engaging the forces of modernization by maintaining cultural distinctiveness, rather than being engulfed and assimilated by them. The politicized quality of cultural identity throws a wrench through the utopian window of the state's expectations. Despite its faith in socialist modernization, the state's promotions of a 'temporary' phenomenon will indeed have long-lasting consequences. Similarly, the confidence with which neo-Marxism has conceived capital's pervasive power over time and space subordinates human culture and consciousness to the role of 'respondent'. Along these lines, ethnic groups in China become victims of forces they supposedly cannot understand and over which they have no power.

In this paper, I have argued that this interpretation is inadequate because it fails to capture the dynamic nature of cultural construction, and the fact that human consciousness does not 'respond' to political-economic logic but continually engages and acts upon it. Rather than representing the modern, commercialized 'space of flows' superseding a traditional 'space of places', ethnic tourism development may be part of an ongoing historical process through which individuals continually reconstruct a localized identity with the space made available by broader systems of political economy. In these terms, 'locality' is simply a contingent component of that 'space of flows' rather than its antithesis. The linear process of change assumed in Marxist theory renders the reassertion of localized differences and autonomy as an increasingly inauthentic and temporary phase at best, a predictable cultural response to the inexorable process of capital's broadening geographical horizons, and its increasingly profound control of the definition of time and space. But in its cultural appropriation, the process of capital *serves* the ongoing redefinition of local place, as do the other integrative forces brought to bear by that vaguest of processes, modernization.

To return, then, to the issue of the 'revival of identities' broached in the beginning of the paper, I would suggest that, however intense, this phenomenon is not such a new thing. The anxious concern over how difference and otherness are asserting themselves seems to reveal a general unwillingness to question the assumption that contemporary cultural conditions are today profoundly 'confused' whereas yesterday everyone knew her or his 'place'. It seems a valid question for argument. My suspicion is that our concern over the confused identities of today relies to a large extent on an idealized conception of a past when identity was a 'natural state'. This is reinforced by our persistent conceptions of space as at one time carved up into neat cultural units only to be flattened out by the unleashing of modernism. Marxist analysis continues to reproduce this idealization in its economic myopia. Again and again the people about whom we theorize somehow get left out of the picture. As the above examples suggest, the power of modernization in redefining space and time is mediated by strategic cultural appropriation of a changing political economy. Although cultural identity is consciously localized in this process, the locality has no boundaries, no static expression. It exists, rather, as the contentious expression of the integration of the cultural and the economic. It is an expression which is dynamic, which is structured systematically and influenced by individual agency, and which is not 'natural' but must be continually constructed and contested.

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