Resourcing culture: is a prosaic 'third space' possible in rural China?

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Abstract. Recalling Tony Bennett's plea for a more 'prosaic' cultural studies, this paper proposes a redefinition of the concept 'third space' as a prosaic space of policy and governmentality. Based on field research in rural China, where cultural heritage has become a central resource in economic development, the paper argues that cultural development cannot be relied upon to produce spaces of resistance, empowerment, or 'sustainability'. This is, in part, because cultural development tends to conceive of cultural spaces as 'rooted' rather than as spaces of translocality. While third space offers an attractive alternative to such a conceptualization, it remains vulnerable to the same alienating spatial abstractions as found in the practices of cultural development. The paper seeks to maintain the critical focus of third space while redefining it in more prosaic terms to better reflect the everyday governmentalized spaces of culture within which people live.

Introduction

"Today it is nearly impossible to find public statements that do not recruit instru-
mentalized art and culture, whether to better social conditions, as in the creation
of multicultural tolerance and civic participation through UNESCO-like advocacy
for cultural citizenship and cultural rights, or to spur economic growth through
urban cultural development projects and the concomitant proliferation of museums
for cultural tourism ..."

<div align="right">George Yúdice (2003, page 11)</div>

With the proclamation by the United Nations Education Science and Culture Organ-
ization (UNESCO) that 1988 to 1997 would be promoted as the "World Decade for
Cultural Development", it became clear that a shift had occurred in the way culture
was understood in relation to both economic development and social sustainability.
On the one hand the culture industries were recognized as taking up a greater share of
global trade, with cultural inputs being identified as vital in the generation of economic
value chains. On the other hand, recognition of the cultural heritage and identity of
specific social groups was regarded as a key to sustainability, good governance, and
even social and environmental justice. As noted by Michael Keane (2004, page 82),
cultural development has since been recognized as a fundamental component in the
generation of "value-adding knowledge-based industries based upon sustainable devel-
opment models" (see also Matarasso, 2001; Yúdice, 2003). Culture, in other words,
is no longer viewed as an obstacle complicating the success of development objectives,
but is rather viewed as "a resource and as a significant variable explaining the success
of development interventions" (Radcliffe and Laurie, 2006, page 231). While it should
not be surprising that an institution like UNESCO would promote culture as the
centerpiece of its sustainable development models, even multilateral lending institu-
tions such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have made culture
integral to their visions of development. In the words of former World Bank president
James Wolfensohn:

"There are development dimensions of culture. Physical and expressive culture is an undervalued resource in developing countries. It can earn income, through tourism, crafts, and other cultural enterprises ... . Heritage gives value. Part of our joint challenge is to analyze the local and national returns on investments which restore and draw value from cultural heritage—whether it is built or living cultural expression, such as indigenous music, theater, crafts" (cited in Yúdice, 2003, page 13).

In the context of state withdrawal from the arena of international development and its replacement by new kinds of public–private partnerships, nongovernmental organizations, and an increasingly unfettered market, culture has come to be viewed as a resource capable of countering the negative effects of neoliberal structural adjustment. This has long been the message of UNESCO; but now even multilateral lending institutions—the very institutions driving this structural shift—are mobilizing culture as the key to community empowerment, sustainable development, political stability, and social welfare. Indeed, investment in culture is even thought to strengthen civil society. States and institutions are thus investing in culture as a front line in combating everything from poverty and substance abuse to criminal activities associated with gangs. One of the most explicit instances of this can be found in Brazil's 'Culture Points' program, where the state invested in bringing hip hop to poor youth in the hopes of turning them into more governable citizen-subjects. As summarized by the Minister of Culture, Gilberto Gil, Culture Points has resulted in "young people who are becoming designers, who are making it into media and being used more and more by television and samba schools and revitalizing degraded neighborhoods ... . It's a different vision of the role of government, a new role" (Rohter, 2007). Culture, here, is not simply a resource for 'sustainability' but is also a vital tool in the ordering of society.

Clearly, then, culture is being put to work in many different ways. For organizations like UNESCO, culture is a resource for community empowerment. For major neoliberal development actors like the World Bank, culture is instrumental to new forms of entrepreneurialism, production, and private investment. And for states experiencing structural adjustment and other reforms that have reduced the government's role in the provision of public welfare, like Brazil, culture is being viewed as a technology of government.

It is precisely this nexus of 'resourcing culture' that I have been investigating in the development strategies of rural Guizhou province in Southwest China. There, many government officials, scholars, and villagers themselves regard the promotion of rural cultural heritage as the key to developing an incipient commercial economy as well as reversing the depopulation of the countryside which has already left a hollowed-out landscape of near-empty communities. Yet while officials often regard culture as both a rich vein of untapped economic ore and a salve for the social instability wrought by three decades of uneven development, villagers have found that, for the most part, cultural development has brought improvement in incomes for only a very small minority of rural elites, while provoking new forms of alienation and discontent rather than ameliorating those problems that already exist (Oakes, 2006). Certainly, cultural development in its current form in rural Guizhou is not enabling villagers to withstand the predations of the local state or the exploitations of the market.

The reasons for this are complex. There are two dimensions to the problem of cultural development in Guizhou. First, culture has come to be viewed as an expedient, capable of achieving certain poverty alleviation and governance objectives. As a resource, culture is thus primarily experienced and understood by villagers both as a campaign of exemplary citizenship and as a commodity around which an entirely new set of material relations of production are being established. These relations are

breeding their own hierarchies of inequality. Second, and paradoxically, culture has *also* come to be viewed by some elites as a kind of commons, a unique space of distinct Chinese social institutions and practices that might provide an alternative to the problems of both market capitalism and state authoritarianism. Yet this 'cultural approach' to rural development has tended to view the village as a kind of pure or utopian space and failed to recognize the ways villages are translocal places infused with mobility and connection to the broader world (Oakes and Schein, 2006). The 'cultural approach' has been unable to locate culture, state, and market simultaneously within the same spaces of everyday life, but has instead conceived of culture as inhabiting an abstract space that bears little resemblance to the places where rural people actually live.

In this essay I argue that, if culture is to be conceived as part of a commons capable of withstanding the predations of the state and the exploitations of the market, then its deployment as an expedient resource of governmentality must be recognized and accounted for. The promise of a cultural commons as the touchstone for sustainable development fails, ironically, to recognize the spaces of everyday life within which culture is itself produced. Those are not the abstract spaces in which development is conceived, but the lived spaces that are themselves produced, in part, by the state and the market. More to the point, I argue that the increasing expediency of culture in fact *enables* this utopian conception of a 'rooted' cultural commons needing protection from the impurities of the wider world. Such a conception of culture as a 'pure space' unsullied by connection is in fact highly marketable itself. And while challenging this 'rooted' conception of culture will probably strike readers as an already well-trodden path of academic posturing, my ultimate objective is to ask whether challenging the 'cultural approach' can avoid the kind of fetishizing of subversion and resistance that too often accompanies cultural criticism. Is it possible, I ask, to conceive of the cultural commons as a 'third space' of hybridity and mixture in such a way that lends itself to the mundane project of formulating a cultural development policy that benefits villagers? While it may be relatively easy, in other words, to criticize the instrumentalism on display throughout the dominant discourses of cultural development in rural China, this paper explores the more difficult question of whether a prosaic cultural critique is possible. How does one work with the critical insights marshaled in the concept of third space while remaining committed to the thoroughly grounded, prosaic, and indeed governmentalized and marketized idea of culture that villagers themselves live with? Is there, in short, a third space of governmentality?

I must admit at the outset that my choice of 'third space' as a conceptual pivot for this argument has been an ambivalent one. At first glance, 'third space' hardly seems to be a concept around which one might build an argument for a prosaic cultural studies of governance and policy. As Katharyne Mitchell argued over a decade ago in this journal, 'third space' marks a "disengenuous move ... to occupy a position 'beyond' space and time, and beyond the situated practices of place and the lived experience of history" (Mitchell, 1997, page 534). Mitchell's point is that the abstract space conceived under the mantle of third space, and the breezy assumption of progressive politics naturally inhabiting such a space, ironically allows for the market's appropriation of third space, rendering it just as easily a "mobile reactionary space rather than a traveling site of resistance" (page 534). The abstract nature of third space, then, "leaves the crucial space of intervention—the 'ambivalent margin'—dangerously unmoored" (page 537). Third space thus becomes an ambivalent space for political intervention, unable to effectively challenge the aggressive claims to transnational spaces of an essentialized and exclusionary cultural politics.

Yet third space does, Mitchell admits, capture an important critical impulse. And the concept has, over time, been called upon to play a strategic role in the formulation of development interventions. In 2005, for instance, the School of Agriculture and Rural Development at People's University in Beijing hosted a conference on "The Third Space of the Commons". The conference was cohosted by the Critical Policy Studies of China group at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ford Foundation, and sought, in the words of conference organizers, to explore "policy options that may nurture the emergence of the third space, an interstitial domain between the 'private' and the 'state'." Along with the other participants in this conference, I was asked to explore ways in which the idea of third space might be mobilized to address the crisis of public goods provision in China, where marketization and decentralization were opening spaces for the privatized provision of public goods. Third space was thus conceived by conference organizers in far more prosaic terms than has typically been found in cultural studies. Third space, here, was not separate from state and market but *mediated* the state and market provision of public goods; it was conceived as a "shared space" nurturing public goods and enabling equal access to them.

While the conference itself only partially succeeded in articulating actual policy options that might cultivate such a third space in China (due largely to the vastly different conceptual baggage that Chinese and foreign participants brought with them), I have remained intrigued by such a prosaic invoking of third space. The goals of the Beijing conference were decidedly practical, not theoretical, and called on third space to define precisely those physical spaces that Mitchell argued were *missing* in the analyses of the term's enthusiastic fans. This essay, then, represents my own efforts to rethink third space from the more prosaic perspective of rural China's governance needs.

Such a 'prosaic perspective' has emerged as a result of my long-term fieldwork in rural Guizhou, which has increasingly blended field research with participation in rural tourism projects. The perspectives offered here derive from one specific three-year project involving collaboration with a team of Guizhou scholars. Our research, conducted between 2003 and 2006, sought to assess the attitudes and involvement of villagers in rural cultural tourism development, and consisted of comprehensive surveys of four villages, and extensive in-depth interviews with nearly one hundred villagers. The paper proceeds with a brief review of the 'cultural approach' in Chinese rural development and the critical interrogation of this approach suggested by third space. The paper then provides an account of cultural development in rural Guizhou in order to explore the actual spaces within which any policy interventions must work.

'New collectivism', the cultural commons, and third space
In the wake of three decades of social and intellectual upheaval under Mao, followed by a decade of both roots searching and unprecedented cultural critique, a strain of cultural nationalism emerged in 1990s China (Guo, 2004). Among the many manifestations of this newfound culturalism was an academic search for China's unique cultural path toward modernization (Lin and Galikowski, 1999; X Zhang, 1998; Xu, 1998). The countryside figured prominently in this search, with a series of studies coalescing under the label of 'new collectivism' [*xin jitizhuyi* (see Chen and Hu, 1996; Wang, 1996)]. Beginning with the premise that Weber's *Protestant Ethic* offered perhaps more insight into the needs of a society undergoing rapid modernization than Marx's *Capital*, new collectivists sought the uniquely Chinese cultural kernel that would play the role of Protestant Christianity in stimulating an alternative Chinese modernity. They found such a kernel in the lineage organizations and intense localism of China's rural communities. This 'cultural approach' (Thogersen, 2002) to understanding Chinese modernization and development saw in the countryside thousands of organic

communities, a kind of commons that met the welfare needs of villagers but which existed outside of the public and private realms of state and market that increasingly defined China's political economy under reform.

Between 1993 and 1995, for instance, several national-scale research projects focused on the development of rural industry in the context of China's unique rural social organization. Wang Hui (1998, pages 22–25) summarized the findings of these studies as focusing on a distinct kind of social consciousness that is said to be the basis of village governance. For new collectivists, this consciousness valued a cooperative spirit, unity, the provision of welfare guarantees, and the extended family as the primary unit of ownership. Such ownership was essentially 'public' but not in the sense of the 'top-down' collectivism imposed by state socialism, though it shared socialism's goal of shared prosperity over the privatization of property. Such a rural social organization was said to be a continuation of traditional lineage culture which always produced an inherently 'collective society' in China's countryside. Thus, while the cultural approach demonstrated a socialist commitment to social justice, these studies did not view village society as a stage for class conflict, as was the exclusive norm during the previous four decades of Marxist social science in China. 'New collectivism' did not view village society as a stage for class conflict. A norm of social harmony was now assumed instead. In this sense, the village had become the new commons, and predictably, its preservation became a popular intellectual project in China. The unique social organization of the village was now said to be under siege—because of, among other things, urban labor migration—and this became a major factor in the local state's promotion of cultural strategies of development in rural China.

In viewing the village as a kind of 'cultural commons'—that is, a reservoir of cultural values from which the Chinese nation should collectively draw—new collectivist scholarship articulated a concept of culture as distinct, unique, and isolated from global connections. Village society, so the argument went, was a resource precisely because it had remained separate from Western-dominated models of development and modernization. Yet in his critique, Wang argued that new collectivists denied the already intimate linkages between daily life in rural China and the global capitalist market. China's 'alternative modernity' based on a 'unique' rural social organization could not exist outside of, as alternative, or in opposition to these linkages, but had to be understood as part of the *outcome* of those linkages themselves. Proponents of new collectivism, Wang (1998, page 25) argued, "have forgotten that the very uniqueness of this path ... is today made possible only because of its relation to global capitalism." Wang's critique thus raised a question not simply for new collectivism but for the concept of the commons more generally. What is the relationship between the commons and broader-scaled processes that inevitably condition local outcomes everywhere? How, to put it more bluntly, is the geography of the commons best conceived? It would seem that the concept of third space might provide a means of challenging the assumptions of original culture inherent in the new collectivist scholarship. However, before exploring this possibility further, a clear distinction must be made between third space and the commons. This is a distinction that the Beijing conference, I would argue, needed to make but did not.

While the idea of the commons has been around for centuries, most of its more recent manifestations emerged within a context of private enclosures of physical resources. As privatization ensued, the state increasingly took on the role of managing—in the interest of the public—the remainder of these resources. The commons came to be associated with the idea that there should remain an alternative to this state-managed vs. private parceling out of resources. The commons was meant to be something neither public nor private. But the idea of the commons has also expanded

to include a broad array of intangible resources that should also be protected from the market and the state. For James Arvanitakis (2006, page 2) the commons thus includes the "cultural sphere" and "can include human relationships such as the need for safety, trust, shared intellect, as well as simply cooperation." Beyond this, the commons has been conceived as more than anything a space of practice and agency. The volume *Whose Common Future?* defined the commons as "the social and political space where things get done and where people have a sense of belonging and an element of control over their lives," providing "sustenance, security and independence" (*The Ecologist* 1993, pages 6–7, cited in Arvanitakis, 2006, page 3).

One specific aspect of the commons that I wish to highlight here has already been noted in the discussion of new collectivism: the context of siege within which the concept has most typically been deployed. Articulations of the commons most often evoke a crisis in which the commons has already been, or is about to be, lost to an imperialist, colonialist, or capitalist political economy (see, for instance, Bollier, 2002; Lessig, 2004). The commons represents an idealized space, a moral geography, wielded more as a critique of contemporary modernization than any space of actual practice. The commons tends to be defined as the pure opposite of the commodity, and also tends to be located in a 'local community' of some kind: a place where people have a sense of belonging and an element of control over their lives. It is difficult not to hear in Arvanitakis's (2006) discussion of the commons, for instance, the echo of Ferdinand Tönnies lamenting the melancholy progression from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1957). While the crisis of siege is most obviously seen in discussions of the enclosure and degradation of physical resources, there is a similar concern for the vulnerability of intangible public goods such as culture. Thus, the very forces that have promoted culture as a new commercial frontier for resource-poor communities and a new panacea for communities experiencing social upheaval, have also produced increasing concern over the sustainability of the cultural commons.

Concern for the cultural commons under siege tends to arise, I would argue, when culture is conceived as a 'pure product' (Clifford, 1988), rooted in a particular location. A root-based, rather than route-based (Clifford, 1997) approach to culture tends to view cultural distinctiveness as born not out of the 'friction' of global connection (Tsing, 2005), but rather out of isolation from global connection. This, at any rate, appears to be the view of culture implied in new collectivist scholarship. In broader terms, because of its typical articulation within a context of siege, the concept of the cultural commons itself is perhaps most typically associated with a root-based approach to culture. If Wang is correct in arguing that village society is in fact an outcome of connection rather than the isolated holdout that new collectivism sees it as, then it might be helpful to rethink the commons through the lens of third space. Such a move might yield a more realistic understanding of the social world within which a workable cultural development policy might be built.

There is no secure definition of third space itself. Two theorists who have used the term explicitly are Homi Bhabha (1994) and Edward Soja (1996). Bhabha (1994, pages 36–37) called third space a space of cultural hybridity in his rejection of the 'modernist' norm of mosaic-style multiculturalism. Bhabha arrived at this understanding of third space via poststructural linguistics, essentially deconstructing a Geertzian approach to culture as a 'web of meaning.' This resulted in cutting cultural meanings loose from any specific evolutionary or generative necessity. That is, cultural meanings for Bhabha are less about ideas handed down within a given community and more about on-going performance and reconstruction. Contrasted to the view of culture as a 'pure product,' Bhabha's third space is, instead, a space of mixture, impurity, and contamination. "Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical

identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (1994, page 37). This makes third space a truly '*inter*national' space—a translocal space of connection 'in-between' nations, peoples, groups, cultures.

For Soja (1996) third space is a tentative and flexible term into which a whole host of alternative or postmodern conceptualizations have been thrown. For him, third space is radically inclusive; it denies the possibility of purity, of separation into the abstract epistemological categories which select and extract practices from their social contexts (see Junka, 2006). The inclusiveness of third space comes via difference, and connection, rather than commonality and separation. Ultimately, third space attempts to understand difference not in terms of 'rooted' cultural categorizations, but in terms of mobility and 'fluidity' (Urry, 2000), producing impurities, mixtures, and hybrids. Third space is a space of translocal connections that produce difference, a space of difference produced in "a world of culturally, socially and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, page 43).

While recognizing the important critical impulse underlying the third space as conceived by theorists like Bhabha and Soja, Mitchell (1997) asks what such spaces of mobility and hybridity actually look like. Looking at the hybrid subjectivities of Hong Kong intellectuals and entrepreneurs, she argues that third space cannot be conceived as inherently progressive, and that the spaces of hybridity and mobility are always available for market commodification and appropriation by exclusionary political projects. Third space, in other words, contains within its own abstractions the seeds of the very forms of alienation that it poses itself against. An answer to this problem might be to articulate third space with public policy in some very mundane and practical ways.

Cultural expediency in China
We may now return to view new collectivism in China in a new light, focusing on the broader context of connections within which this scholarship itself emerged. Part of that broader context is not simply the global capitalist market as indicated by Wang, but, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, a global shift toward viewing culture as a development and governance resource. New collectivism shares with this broader 'cultural turn' an instrumental and expedient approach to culture, in which culture is itself an agent of transformation towards (presumably) more sustainable outcomes. This expediency of culture (Yúdice, 2003) is manifest in two distinct but interrelated ways: first, as a resource for new forms of capital accumulation and market expansion, and second, as a new model of rural governance. In China both of these forms of expediency draw not only from a new global discourse of cultural development, but also from a long Chinese history of viewing the village as a kind of project (Duara, 2000) and culture as an essentially transformative agent for inculcating correct moral values and proper ritual practice.

George Yúdice (2003) finds that the expediency of culture needs to be understood in the context of globalization and the retreat of the welfare state. "Culture as resource", he argues, "is seen as a way of providing social welfare and quality of life in the context of diminishing public resources and the withdrawal of the state from the guarantees of the good life" (page 279). Thus, culture is increasingly looked upon to fulfill a social management role. Indeed, as Brazil's 'Culture Points' program illustrates, cultural development has itself become a state strategy to cure the social ills left in the wake of neoliberal restructuring (Rohter, 2007). At the same time, however, culture becomes thoroughly marketized as part of a state's package of comparative advantages in the competitive arena of global trade. In response, culture is being redefined

(for instance, under NAFTA), as property in the form of designs, patents, trademarks, and copyrights. These forms of property are, in turn, typically assigned to individuals or companies rather than social groups. In this context, the content of culture becomes less important than the social and economic role that culture is positioned to play in global trade and development. Yúdice notes that the hollowing out of the content of culture goes hand in hand with the claims of multicultural difference that increasingly broker the access of social groups to state entitlements.

"It might be said that previous understandings of culture—canons of artistic excellence, symbolic patterns that give coherence to and thus endow a group of people or society with human worth, or culture as discipline—give way to the expediency of culture. In our era, *claims* to difference and culture are expedient insofar as they presumably lead to the empowerment of a community" (Yúdice, 2003, page 334; see also Benhabib, 2002).

Because of this emptying out of the content of culture, Yúdice suggests that culture is no longer the terrain of political struggle that Gramsci said it was. And it is culture's expediency in the provision of entitlements and market access that has convinced Tony Bennett to argue for a Foucauldian—as opposed to Gramscian—approach to cultural studies. Bennett (1998, page 30) argues that culture has been so deeply governmentalized that "it now makes no sense—if ever it did—to think of culture as a ground situated outside the domain of government and providing the resources through which that domain might be resisted." As a marker of difference, culture is seen by Bennett as a mechanism by which populations are made into knowable objects and thus culture is itself implicated in the exercise of power, rather than providing a 'commons' or a space of resistance beyond power. It becomes increasingly difficult, in other words, to think of culture as an idealized resource for 'community empowerment' or even 'sustainable development' in any meaningful sense of these terms. Because culture is already a discursive element of social regulation, Bennett's argument suggests, there is no Gramscian role for culture to play in any project of counterhegemony, of which we might assume a 'commons' to be part. The implication is less that culture should be abandoned in our search for a viable commons, but that such a space cannot be conceived as existing beyond the reach of governmentality (Barnett, 2001).

Bennett (1998, page 82) argues that

"cultural resources are always caught up in, and function as parts of, cultural technologies which, through the ordering and shaping of social relations which they effect, play an important role in organizing different fields of human conduct. The business which culture is caught up in, looked at in these terms, goes beyond the influence of institutional practices, administrative routines and spatial arrangements on the available repertoires of human conduct and patterns of social interaction."

What Bennett seeks is not the surrender of culture to the powers of state and market, but a prosaic scholarship of detailed engagement with the policies and programs through which particular fields of conduct and practice are organized and regulated. Rather than searching for a cultural commons protected from global connection, then, we might ask whether third space can answer Bennett's call for a prosaic cultural studies. Does the critique of the 'cultural commons' implicit in the concept of third space enable third space to inform our engagement with the policies and programs of cultural development in rural China?

There is now no shortage of policies and programs in China with which such a prosaic intellectual project might engage. Chinese rural development programs now resource culture in many ways (Feng, 1999; Goodman, 2002; Oakes, 2000). Provincial governments have been mobilizing regional cultural symbols in an effort to 'brand'

local culture for the purposes of commercial development (see, for example, Yi 2002; Z Zhang, 1998; Zhou and Kong, 2000; Zhou and Li, 1998). Local governments, too, have been turning their specialty export products into 'culture' in order to laden its exchange value with symbolic capital as well as inculcate a market consciousness among locals and provide new opportunities for commercial entrepreneurialism. The result has been a proliferation of territorial brands with labels like 'Hunan lotus culture,' 'bamboo weaving culture', 'paper-cut culture', 'bamboo shoot culture', 'liquor distilling culture', 'tea culture', and so on.

As an economic sector, culture is subject both to regulation through state policies and promotion through state entrepreneurship (J Wang, 2003). The state recognizes both commercial culture industries (*wenhua chanye*, such as audiovisual production, tourism, performance industries, sports and entertainment industries) and public cultural institutions (*wenhua shiye*, such as compulsory education, libraries, museums, and cultural work and preservation units). And while the first designation is supposed to indicate those areas of cultural production from which the state expects to withdraw, both cultural industries and institutions could be regarded as part of a broader state-market partnership through which cultural production is mobilized for both economic development and enhancing local-scale governance. "Culture", Jing Wang (2001, page 71) argues, "is a top agenda item for public policy makers, city planners, and both the central and local states." Culture is a site where political and economic capital can now be accumulated in China: "The state's rediscovery of culture as a site where new ruling technologies can be deployed and converted simultaneously into economic capital constitutes one of its most innovative strategies of statecraft since the founding of the People's Republic" (pages 71 – 72).

Cultural strategies are thus viewed not simply in terms of commercial development, but as a broader governance mechanism. Local states find themselves asking the following question: "How might cultural programs be developed to encourage populations to be more resourceful and self-regulating?" (Keane, 2004, page 80). Cultural strategies can be instrumental in creating new subjectivities which contribute to the state's desired governance outcomes. At the local scale, cultural strategies are meant to create enterprising and consuming subjects (Hoffman, 2006; Pun, 2003; Wang, 2001; Yan, 2003). Indeed, for this reason, cultural development is regarded by some as *the* fundamental centerpiece of local state policy (Zhou and Kong, 2000). Cultural development is now fundamental to establishing social order (Ma, 2004). The Chinese state has collaborated with the market to produce a new consuming subject in urban China by, for instance, shortening the work week to five days, implementing three national (though now defunct) 'golden weeks' for travel and leisure, lowering interest rates so residents can spend more, and shifting entertainment into the realm of 'middle-class' consumers rather than elites (Wang, 2001, page 76).

While the state's collaboration with the market to produce governance outcomes via cultural development might be considered a relatively new form of governmentality in China, it should be pointed out that governing with culture is nothing new there. The term itself—*wenhua*—is an early 20th century neologism literally meaning 'to become literate'. Keane has pointed out that *wenhua* implied a refined and noncoercive form of rule: "Learning [*wenhua*] was imperative to the art of government" (2007, page 36). According to Wang Di (2003, page 108), popular cultural practices—operas, storytelling, rituals—were viewed by elite reformers as responsible for the moral degeneracy of the public and were thus targeted as the key vehicles for reforming social customs and making the public more governable as modern citizens. Under Mao, culture continued to be deployed as a technology of government, with 'learning' recast as revolutionary class consciousness rather than bourgeois civility. For Mao, culture would act directly on society, to remake the Chinese (revolutionary) subject.

But like earlier reformers, Mao sought to achieve this by adopting popular cultural forms and giving them revolutionary content (the so-called 'mass line'). In this way, culture would also be the mechanism of unifying the contradictions between peasants and intellectuals, an approach that was taken to extremes during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s. Regardless of the political ideologies of the elites who manipulated it, then, culture remained a technology of government, and has been overwhelmingly experienced as such by China's peasantry.

A third space for village cultural development?
Let me briefly summarize the argument thus far. The cultural commons implied in China's culturalist scholarship assumes a pure cultural space isolated from global connection, market integration, and governmental regulation. Such an approach fails to recognize—as pointed out by both Bennett and Yúdice—the governmentality and expediency of culture today. It follows that culture cannot be called upon as a 'public good' without recognizing the ways cultural production is already wrapped up in translocal connections enabled by both state and market forces. The governmentality of culture makes that idealized space of the commons untenable in the policy arena and unrealistic in describing the actual lived spaces within which culture is produced. While third space suggests an alternative conceptualization of a lived and impure cultural space that is not separate from the spaces of power produced by state and market, the concept is itself problematic unless tied to a more prosaic project of cultural development policy. The expediency and 'hollowing out' of culture today have made it available as a resource for multiple projects, and thus any assumption that cultural development is *inherently* sustainable or empowering for communities is naïve (at best) or disingenuous. Similarly, assumptions that third space is *inherently* destabilizing or subversive to dominant power is similarly naïve or (as Mitchell herself claims) disingenuous unless grounded or contextualized in specific sociospatial relations.

Networked and impure cultural spaces can be found just about anywhere. Certainly they are readily observable in the areas of rural Guizhou where I have been investigating the implications of cultural development for village social relations. In these villages, culture is clearly viewed as the expedient resource that it is. Indeed, the villagers I have interviewed understand the expediency of culture better than most intellectuals, who still tend to view it only as a way of life, a pure category of social practice apart from politics, economics, and so on. But villagers understand the expediency of culture in terms of its potential to bring new sources of income, prosperity, and pride to their lives, as well as its already experienced ability to discipline behavior and introduce new kinds of social discontent and economic alienation (Oakes, 2005). It is this experience of discipline and alienation at the hands of cultural development which has mobilized many villagers, as well as local scholars, to draw on translocal networks to produce an alternative village space which might allow for a more just and equitable benefits (Oakes and Wu, 2007).

The villages where I have been working are known as sites of 'tunpu culture.' Found throughout the stony karst plateaus and basins of central Guizhou province in Southwest China, they are inhabited by people who claim as their ancestors soldiers garrisoned along the imperial frontier during the early years of the Ming Dynasty in the late 14th century. Such ancestry is significant in Guizhou, a poor and isolated region with a large significant population of non-Han ethnic minorities. By keeping genealogies, tunpu villagers clung to their status as 'outsiders' marooned in their fortress-like villages amid a sea of indigenes. While cultural mixing and, eventually, intermarriage with neighboring minority villages over the ensuing six hundred years was inevitable, tunpu people today maintain a discourse of an ancient and 'civilized'

Han identity vis-à-vis the non-Han peoples among whom they live. And it is this discourse of civilization that has enabled tunpu to become a technology of government today.

Tunpu is a term that emerged only in the 1980s when Chinese ethnologists began to take an interest in the masked ritual theater, known as *dixi*, performed by the villagers of central Guizhou. This interest developed in the broader context of roots searching and 'salvage ethnography' that swept across China, as scholars rediscovered in the countryside folk cultural traditions thought to have been stamped out by ideological zeal of the Mao era. Their training in orthodox Marxist evolutionary theory, however, led to a spate of 'living fossil' labels for any cultural practice that seemed to have survived encrusted in the sediment of China's 'timeless' rural society (Holm, 2003; Yan, 1989; Zhang, 1996). These practices were thought to have missed out on the evolutionary developments theorized by Engels and taken as a fact of history by a whole generation of Marxist scholarship in China (Tong, 1989). In the 1980s *dixi* was seen in this light, as a frozen specimen with a direct link to a distant past (Shen et al, 1990; Zhou, 1996).

Yet despite its label of 'living fossil' signifying a group of people frozen in time and only recently unearthed, tunpu culture is in fact the product of contemporary scholarly activities, as well as economic and cultural development policies and practices. Tunpu has emerged from the early by-product of a scholarly interest in a local drama form to become an expedient resource for local economic and cultural development. At the same time, tunpu is increasingly viewed as an exemplary rural governance model. The expediency of tunpu culture can be expressed in at least three ways:

First, tunpu is expedient as a heritage resource for Guizhou Province. Because of its historical link to the founding of the Ming Dynasty, tunpu also helps locate Guizhou's heritage on the broader canvas of Chinese history and cultural tradition (Zheng, 2001). Second, tunpu is expedient as a resource for tourism development (Shen 2002; Zhang, 2002). In its early period during the 1990s, Guizhou's cultural tourism was defined entirely by ethnic minorities such as the Miao, Dong, and Buyi. Tunpu represented a colorful and exotic folk culture that was also Han. For many local scholars, this was a significant aspect of their interest in the context of the 1980s 'roots searching' (*xungen*) movements and general post-Cultural-Revolution malaise. Tunpu offered an exotic folk culture that was part of a living Han tradition, thus revealing how the Han had not lost touch with their cultural roots in spite of all the turmoil of the recent decades. Third, tunpu is expedient as a technology of government. Because of its strong associations with Confucianism and ancestor worship, tunpu culture is called upon to help construct 'socialist spiritual civilization' and building 'quality' (*suzhi*) citizen-subjects in rural Guizhou (Weng, no date). Many scholarly accounts portray the arrival of Ming soldiers and settlers as the shock that brought the pride of an ancient land back to life and inaugurated Guizhou's long journey to modernization.

In its role as midwife to modern Guizhou, tunpu culture now symbolizes the civilizing of the frontier, and provides an explicit model for exemplary entrepreneurial behavior and self-discipline among villagers. This is succinctly illustrated in the following comment from a tunpu village leader:

"*Where did you hear about this idea of preservation?*
I've worked with specialists, students, scholars [when they visit the village]. After they talk I understand. I comprehend culture, appreciate culture. If you don't understand culture, then preservation doesn't make any sense … . To raise local cultural consciousness, cultural quality, what culture *is*, you have to instruct [the other villagers], so I tell them that our houses are relics of [the Yangzi delta region] because our ancestors came from there. The style of that place was brought and built here, a Yangzi delta relic preserved 600 years. It's our treasure, a wealth bequeathed by our ancestors. So it must be preserved. It's our money tree. After people come,

we get benefits, cultural consciousness, preservation consciousness. It makes us smarter, stronger. It's very important that tourists *understand* tunpu culture, not just wander through the village. They need to understand that we are people of culture" (transcripts 5/15/04-5).

Tunpu's exemplary status (see Bakken, 2000) is also understood as such by virtue of its connection to the government, intellectuals, and even international organizations. The following comment by a village elder is indicative:

"*Should tunpu culture be preserved?*

Of course it should be preserved. Now the government is developing tourism here. So we have to preserve tunpu culture. It's not a question of whether or not I think it should be preserved. It's what the government wants. Because tunpu is very distinctive. In all of China, there's nothing as distinctive as tunpu. I've read that in many research documents. Those scholars have been many places and they haven't found tunpu people anywhere else. And it has international value. The first time I ever heard the term 'tunpu person' was when the United Nations came to do research on it" (transcripts 5/18/04-18c).

But villagers themselves are also unclear about the meaning and, in particular, the cultural content of tunpu. It is a term with which they have only recently become familiar. Authorities and scholars list a relatively standard set of cultural traits when asked to define the term, but these—for example, 'ancestor worship' or 'distinctive architecture'—only vaguely describe the great variety of actual practices from village to village. Tunpu villages are typically identified as 'stockades', 'garrisons', or 'forts', with narrow cobblestone lanes, stone houses and walls—a landscape forged of frontier violence. Yet, many tunpu villages were built not by the original soldiers garrisoned on the frontier, but by later-arriving merchants. These villages contain architectural styles more similar to the classic courtyard houses of central China than military garrisons. The ambiguities inherent in having such different cultural landscapes encoded as equally tunpu has encouraged villagers themselves to regard the term less as a marker of identity than a convenient label for a variety of policies promoting economic development, marketing, historical research, and correct behavior (see box 1). They regard tunpu, in other words, as the top-down construction that it is. For most villagers, tunpu refers to the growing wave of outsiders—scholars and tourists—who arrive in their villages, cameras and notepads in hand. Tunpu means modernization, state investment, and the future promise of a higher standard of living as long as villagers themselves learn sufficiently how to *become tunpu*. As an expedient resource, then, tunpu is indeed a culture hollowed out of meaning; its content is less important than its role as expedient.

Box 1
Sample villager responses to the question: What is tunpu culture?
"Only the brigade [leaders] knows what tunpu culture is. They don't tell us about that."
"Tunpu culture means paving the basketball court with old flagstones instead of new cement."
"Tunpu culture is a tourist site"
"Tunpu culture is mountains"
"Tunpu is just a name, we don't use that term"
"Tunpu culture is old things, old building, old stone carvings"
"Tunpu culture is tourism development"
"Tunpu is opening tourism, making buildings, making houses [look old]; people come to be tourists and we dance for them.
"I don't dare say what tunpu culture is"
(Transcripts 2004–2005)

However, this does not mean that there is no need to secure a standardized definition of pure or authentic tunpu culture against which different villages may be measured in order to determine their potential value as sites for tunpu cultural development. While there is significant variation from village to village in terms of actual histories, meanings and practices, tunpu imposes a unity that villagers themselves do not experience. Villagers tend to view themselves as several distinct populations, depending on when and under what circumstances their ancestors arrived in the area. They are far more likely to articulate their differences from other villagers than they are to affirm a common bond under the umbrella of tunpu. "In fact", one local scholar told me, "tunpu is just an invention of scholars. It's something that's important to us, but not very important to the villagers" (transcripts 11/18/04-1).

But tunpu is becoming important to villagers as they begin to recognize its expediency as a development and governance resource. With this realization has come a rise in contested claims over the ownership and content of tunpu. These contests include rival claims of authenticity between villages, as well as disputes involving the control of specific cultural resources, such as village landscapes, between private tourism development companies and villagers. Preservation regulations developed and enforced by private tourism companies have limited the control of villagers over the modification of their homes. In fact, the local government's approved 'model' for tunpu cultural development prioritizes the role of private companies in developing tunpu heritage. And while the privatization of cultural resources is viewed by officials as the most efficient way to capitalize on tunpu, there is also significant stress placed on educating and 'training' (*peixun*) villagers about the value of cultural heritage. Villagers are thus disciplined into protecting what they regard as a derelict premodern landscape as an economic asset. Tunpu brings not simply a promise of higher incomes for villagers, but also the idea that a heritage-based cultural economy will improve the 'quality' (*suzhi*) of villagers too.

Indeed, higher incomes remain elusive to the vast majority of villagers, and tunpu thus is most meaningful to villagers not in economic but in governance terms. Almost all villagers interviewed or surveyed articulated the benefits of tunpu tourism not in financial terms but in terms of bringing about more 'civilized' behavior among villagers. Villagers now took responsibility for keeping public spaces neat and tidy, and villages were more lively and fun (*renao*) these days. Many villagers, however, were also upset with the new disciplinary constraints that tunpu placed on their lives, complaining that they could not modernize their houses or make them more comfortable because of preservation regulations. Yet few dared to complain publicly for fear of being viewed as opposing economic development and not appearing to be a good citizen-subject of cultural development.

Tunpu thus enmeshes villagers in a multiscaled space of official networks and market connections at the same time that it attempts to produce a closed-off 'commons' of preserved cultural purity. These networks and connections involve the tourism industry, local, national, and international scholars, organizations such as the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO, officials at various levels of administration (township, town, county, province), and villagers themselves who travel for work or represent their villages at official economic or cultural events at both provincial and national levels. All of these contribute to tunpu cultural development even as they result in the articulation of tunpu as a pure culture needing preservation and protection from change.

This contradiction—between the translocal space in which tunpu cultural development occurs and the bounded space of cultural purity that tunpu cultural development seeks to create—is mirrored by the contradiction identified by Wang Hui (1998)

concerning new collectivist scholarship. It is also mirrored by the contradiction underlying the cultural commons more generally: that is, between the lived space of people's daily lives and the idealized space imagined by scholars as a refuge for certain moral values under siege. Indeed, some local intellectuals now call for a tunpu cultural commons as a means of resolving the conflicts emerging out of tunpu's expediency as a development resource. And while efforts to keep village cultural resources from being privatized and commodified make sense from the idealized perspective of the commons, this would clearly not be acceptable to most of the villagers themselves. Tunpu culture is, after all, regarded by villagers as a commodity more than anything; it has emerged in a context of expediency and this makes the project of purity rightly absurd in their eyes.

Viewing tunpu as a third space would reject any such search for a pure form of culture that could exist beyond the manipulations of state and market. If there is a tunpu cultural commons, it exists as part of the translocal space of connection within which villagers already live. From this recognition one could begin to think through Bennett's (1998) more prosaic or policy-oriented approach to cultural development. In the case of tunpu, such an approach would begin by facilitating the abilities of villagers to benefit from translocal linkages across space. Indeed, a number of villagers are already doing this, drawing on their contacts with provincial, national, and international scholars and nongovernmental agents to establish village-owned heritage companies. One such village, for instance, established a joint stockholding cultural development company exclusively held by villagers themselves, with an international advisory board of scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States to help market their products, attract tourists, and help ensure an equitable distribution of income. Such companies still follow the state-approved model and still enroll market mechanisms in order to 'sell' tunpu cultural resources. They even maintain some of the same disciplining and educating roles typically associated with tunpu cultural development.

The geographic modalities by which a prosaic third space might be enacted in rural Guizhou, then, are generated within the spaces of state policy and market logic that have, thus far, failed to bring significant benefits to most villagers. This apparent contradiction expresses both the limits and the possibilities of a prosaic third space. The point is not, in other words, to resist the relentless commodification and governmentalization of cultural resources, but to enable villagers more control over the means of cultural production. In the case of tunpu, then, this means adapting state development models that seek to privatize village tourism development to encourage village-owned culture industries. It means promoting cultural marketing cooperatives, tourism agencies, design and arts collectives, and other translocal assemblages that bring villagers into conversation with creative agents working at multiple scales. It means, in short, *working with* the networks of cultural economy that have already ensnared tunpu villagers in a new symbolic economy.

While this prosaic third space thus remains a space of governmentality, it has at least been moored to the actual social circumstances of a particular village in order to ensure a more just process of development from the perspective of villagers themselves. While villagers are not, therefore, free of some of the contradictions of tunpu development, they are hopeful of a more promising start than experienced by some of their neighbors who are increasingly feeling exploited by outside companies. A third space approach would begin, in this case, by advocating policy that provides services to villagers seeking to capitalize on the translocal connections that have produced tunpu in the first place. Currently the primary obstacle that villagers face in developing their own companies is local government policy that aims to offer up villages as enclosed and pure cultural spaces for purchase and development by outside tourism companies.

State officials conveniently define tunpu villages as pure cultural spaces under siege, and this definition both necessitates outside intervention to 'protect' and 'manage' villages and makes it impossible to conceive of villagers themselves as managing their interactions with the market.

This is in many ways a simple policy problem. But correcting it means jettisoning the idea of recovering a pure space beyond state and capital from which to resist power. Instead, a third space for tunpu cultural development must work with the translocal connections that increasingly condition the daily lives of tunpu villagers. And given the highly governmentalized nature of tunpu culture, a third space for tunpu cultural development must remain a space of governance. In a statement meant to convey the prosaic directions that cultural studies has inevitably moved in, Bennett (1998, page 51) argued that

> "The destiny, if not the mission, of cultural studies may thus, in the long haul, prove to be that of allowing everyday life and cultural experience to be fashioned into instruments of government via their inscription in new forms of teaching and training."

In Guizhou's tunpu villages, Bennett's vision of culture's 'destiny' appears to have already been realized.

In this essay I have only been able to sketch briefly the outline of a prosaic third space approach to cultural development in rural China. While it may appear pessimistic to assert the misguided nature of any idea of creating a space beyond or between the exploitative machinations of the state and the market, the point is that such an abstract representation of space is *precisely* what the state and market themselves are up to. The real potential of third space is found, it seems, not in its marginal qualities of abstract *différance*, with the 'good fight' of resistance such abstraction implies, but in the prosaic and indeed compromised realm of policy. In the case of tunpu, this lived space is part of the translocal networks linking villagers to an array of cultural agents and political–economic processes operating at various scales. Certainly it is an impure space of 'hybridity'. But more significantly, it is the only space villagers themselves are prepared to inhabit and make their own.

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