Travelling Ethics: Valuing Harmony, Habitat and Heritage while Consuming People and Places

A variety of ethical tourism initiatives have arisen which look at the distribution of benefits and costs arising from the movement of western tourists who are consuming places in the Global South. This paper troubles those positions. Taking the case of the rise of domestic tourism in China, the paper examines the linked patterns of ethnic and nature based tourism. Theories of how natural and cultural heritage are valued by tourists are typically derived from Western historical precedents. Notions of individualised, romantic modes of consumption of pristine nature may well be inadequate in other contexts. The paper examines the double edged role of Chinese notions of harmony of people and nature in offering new opportunities for development for poor minority groups whilst also enrolling them in 4 modes of governance that turn them into bio-cultural resources. Looking across examples drawn from Yunnan in South Western China, the paper identifies how environmental ethics are mobilised and script minority identities in 4 ways: the valorisation of geopiety, blurring nature and culture in geotourism, in quests for rural simplicity, and celebrations of place based folk culture that simultaneously render it mobile. The rise of domestic environmentally concerned tourism is shown to fit the emergence of an ecological but market led mode of governance over minority groups.

Introduction

The literature on ethical consumption largely bifurcates between the majority of studies focusing upon processes where stationary Western consumers purchases products that travel from the global south to a consumption milieu in the metropolitan core and those on ethical tourism which looks at metropolitan travellers to the global South visiting poor indigenous peoples. The assumption for both is that ethical purchasing can lead to an ethically improved self and also to public effects on how the world is organised. The first dimension for both is a moral selving or virtue ethic (where the virtue attaches to the person) as much as the second ethics in practice. Creating the possibility for tourists to improve the lot of the poor and conserve the environment has been the concern of ethical tourism and especially eco-tourism initiatives. If this special issue largely troubles the destination of goods, looking at consumers in the global south, then it also needs to consider what happens when tourists come from there as opposed to the global North. The mobilities of ethical tourism differ from other ethical consumption in how they makeproducers and benefits visible. Rather than 'think global, act local' it implies an ethics of 'move globally, act on others' localities'. It relies on the visitors thus being able to see the benefits or objects of conservation in terms of something that 'looks' like their understanding of healthy and attractive nature. The result is commercial pressure to adapt ecosystems and communities to deliver those signifiers, be they totemic flora and fauna or exotically costumed peoples, as much as actual benefits (Carrier, 2008; 2011). It further means that travel and visuality have come to 'frame the opportunities, possibilities and meanings of tourism for village residents' (Chio, 2014, page 9).

This paper will trouble eco-tourism assumptions by asking what happens when non-western tourists have different senses of what constitutes an 'ethical' relationship to nature, ideas of what is 'natural', what indigenous communities should be and thus what 'benefits' look like. Using Chinese domestic tourism it will seek to ask whether the ethics and the concept of ethical tourism can be

broadened from niche product to mass market (Sharpley, 2009)and also travel from Northern to Southern consumers. This paper, first, looks at how Chinese 'ordinary ethics' (Stafford, 2013) are evolving where social relations, materialities and markets intersect. Second, it asks how systems of landscape values become conscripted into a resource for 'sustainable' consumption. It examines how specific cultural relationships with nature are constructed as exemplifying harmony and become a biocultural resource for development. Thus it takes ethical consumption beyond things produced for the market and into what Polanyi would call 'fictitious commodities' of things that are not produced directly for sale, but are appropriated in situ, like hotels selling their views or access to nature reserves (Carrier, 2011, page 205). This it will do in the context of Yunnan Province, a relatively poor and ethnically diverse province in South West China which has become prominently associated with 'ethnic tourism' –that is tourism to see minority cultures. To do so it reviews literature across a range of three of the biomes and five of the cultural groups in the province, thus drawing patterns across groups in a field where papers usually work from one case study. It uses field data, local media and advertising materials from field visits between 2007 and 2013.[1] In so doing it draws out comparative insights looking at the role of 'harmony' in local and Chinese environmental ethics, at the naturalising of ethnic identities through natural landscapes and the fusing of notions of ethical responsibility for the environment with forms of alternative consumption and quests for simplicity. The paper tracks the uneasy alliance of valuing nature with cultural exoticism for Chinese consumers.

The rise of Chinese tourism poses a challenge to cultural studies of tourism that have derived a series of prototypical tourist figures from Western experience. In China we encounter a country where up until 30 years ago the 'tourist' was castigated as a bourgeois western figure. Domestic

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[1] The data have been collected on a series of visits by the author and field assistants. Especial thanks goes to Chen Yapin of Yunnan Normal University for awealth of material, Lei Fi and Peter Eliot at Durham who spent 3 months in northern Yunnan and a month in Southern and then Northern Yunnan respectively. The data collected include tallies of enterprises and scenic sites, promotional and display materials from those sites, and meetings with local officials and tourist workers in Dêqên , Shilin and Yuanyang Counties and Xishuangbanna National Park.

mass tourism was socially and institutionally promoted only in the late 1990s in attempts to stimulate the Chinese consumer economy during an economic slowdown. The Chinese state also identified tourism as a mechanism for spreading the rising wealth in the eastern coastal cities into the Western provinces and rural areas (Mackerras, 2003). The 'Open up the West' project used tourism as a mechanism for this perhaps reaching its apogee in the "Greater Shangri-la Tourism Investment and Development Project" discussed below (Sofield and Li, 2011). There has been considerable academic interest in 'pro-poor' tourism in China especially as a way of distributing wealth from rapidly developing cities to poorer rural areas (Zeng and Ryan, 2012). The current 12th five year plan announced 'we will comprehensively promote eco-tourism, [and] encourage in-depth development of cultural tourism' (Xiao, 2013, page 1).

The effect has been rapidly rising visitor numbers to rural tourist destinations as China's newly wealthy middle class seek to escape polluted cities and travel to places with clean air and water and forest landscapes (Gao et al. 2009; Wu et al. 2009). Affluent urbanites from the economically developed areas of China seek out minority ethnic cultures partly to experience harmony with nature (Yang, 2012; Yang and Wall, 2009a). The appeal of 'rural ethnic villages in China is rooted in the circuits of a (trans)national nostalgia for a landscape that appears to embody, nourish and sustain a more fundamental relationship between nature and human society' (Chio, 2014, page 10). The scale of domestic demand is striking, with 274 million tourists visiting forest parks during 2008 (Wang and Buckley, 2010) leading to celebrated sites such as the ethnic minority world heritage city of Lijiang facing demand management issues (Cros, 2008).

This upsurge tapped into long traditions of valuing nature that both mobilised and clashed with new modalities of valuing other people and places. The state aimed to create an individualised and desiring subject but this has created 'a possibility for linking this new self with a (western style) cosmopolitan ethics of global neoliberalism and consumerism' (Yan, 2011, page 47). This ethical shift to an individualised system of rights and self-development, instead of collective responsibility and

self-sacrifice, entails a concomitant shift from traditionally particularistic morals where 'treating an outsider poorly is taken lightly' to the rise of a generalized notion of compassion and caring that applies equally to all (Yan, 2011, pages 59-63). Thus it is only in the 2000s that a notion of individual responsibility for the distant environment (and distant impoverished others) has risen (Jankowiak, 2004).

Mobilising ethics, localising values: approaches to ethics, consumption and tourism in China

The tourism promoted by environmental values varies in terms of ethical commitment to the environment and people. The weakest form is 'nature tourism' which says little about the effects of tourism but trades upon elements of nature, be that the scenery to 'wilderness' to geological features in 'geotourism'. More strongly 'eco-tourism' commits to not only benefiting people from visits to natural attractions but benefiting the natural world, or at least mitigating any damage. The oft recited three elements of ecotourism are (1) conservation; (2) benefiting, respecting and empowering local communities; and (3) educating as well as entertaining tourists (Tisdell, 1996). A general critique of ecotourism is that it is 'blue-green' treating nature as a resource and environment and local cultures as things to be consumed by outsiders (Duffy, 2002). It values people and places extrinsically – looking to protect them by creating a market value for them. Approaches such as Community Based Eco-Tourism attempt to maximise both local economic value capture and local control of 'intrinsic' nature values (Gui et al., 2004).

Across the spectrum of tourism there is a fair amount of confusion around what counts as 'eco-tourism' in China, depending on whether it focuses upon options of environmental protection, benefit to inhabitants, a getting back to nature experience, promoting a ethic of environmental responsibility or celebrating nature (Wu et al., 2007). Although the usual translation of ecotourism in Mandarin is *shengtai lüyou* (Wang and Buckley, 2010), the confused practice also is refracted

through an ambiguous set of translated analytic terms where there is clear overlap but not complete alignment – not least since Chinese practice tends to include health outcomes for visitors and allows the 'enhancing' of nature (Buckley et al., 2008). There is a slippage under the label ecotourism/ *shengtai lüyou* between conservation minded initiatives limiting the incursions of tourism and those seeking to maximise the revenue from nature based activities for local and regional development. This means pretty much any nature based development in China will claim the eco tourism label (Xu et al., 2014). This fluidity is enabled by claiming the Chinese ordinary ethic of "harmony" which functions as a common, everyday instrument of choice for dealing with potential conflict and tension, between development and conservation, people and nature (Xu et al., 2014). It says both what is valued in minority relations with nature – a balance of humans and environment – but also permits developments for tourism.

If there is then a gamut of different degrees of environmental engagement in making different destinations, there is a similarly wide range of tourist engagements. As Mckercher and Du Clos (2003) argue one can stretch out cultural or environmental tourists along a field of how important the issue is to their trip and how that relates to their engagement so they might be incidental, serendipitous, casual, sightseeing or actively engaged with the natural environment.

Chinese practice also restages but also challenges another dualism in most ecotourism analysis, a vision of small, traditional communities being the scale for 'good' action and a template for 'good' development' which fosters a particular moral and spatial economy based on 'the existence of presumed "local" figures (normally the natives and, in particular, their selected representatives) that putatively stand there and live "locally" ' (Sin and Minca, 2014, page 97). The moral economy of responsibility firstly depicts a separation of tourist and community. The former is mobile the latter is spatially limited and constrained. The latter is also temporally fixed as 'traditional'. This leads to a binarised geography of local place versus global tourist industry, produced by the artificial closure of places and the denial of 'local's' mobility (Crang, 2006, page 55). This division is then all too often

shackled to a series of simplistic binaries: authentic versus artificial, traditional versus modern, cultural (preservation) versus economic (development), ethnic autonomy versus state control (Oakes, 2005; Yang and Wall, 2009b). Such binaries are often perpetuated in marketing for cultural tourism that trades on notions of enchantment and deploys, at best, a strategic essentialism to fit the demand (Tomaselli, 2012).

'Ethnic tourism' thus turns the minority into a resource or object of the tourist gaze. It trades upon the idea that there is a static mosaic of ethnic difference, linked to the variegations of the natural environment, over which a mobile traveller can roam. It builds on colonial accounts of regions such as South West China that linked ecology and cultural variation:

> 'It is safe to assert that in hardly any other part of the world is there such a large variety of languages and dialects as are to be heard in the country which lies between Assam and the Eastern border of Yün-nan and in the Indo-Chinese countries to the south of this region. // The reason is not hard to find. It lies in the physical characteristics of the country. It is the high mountain ranges and the deep swift-flowing rivers that have brought the differences in customs and language, and the innumerable tribal distinctions' (Davies, 1909, page 332)

The figure of the ethical tourist does not disrupt but if anything reinforces this positioning. The ethical tourist is constituted as the privileged and mobile actor but one for whom the visited other is an object of concern. An archetypal cosmopolitan subject marked out as mobile, consuming people and places, curious, openness to the ethnic Other, and semiotically able to interpret society (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006) rendered apparent to them in a kind of 'windshield ethnography' (Swain, 2011). As such it is a touristic regime that both needs and produces a static ethnic other. The outcomes can be just as clichéd as mass beach tourism driven by the four S's of sun, sand, sea and sex, with ethnic tourism captivated by the 4 Hs of heritage, history, handicrafts, and habitat (Xie, 2011, page 8).

In South West China, such biocultural imaginings suppress ethnic minority populations' long histories of movement (Wang et al., 2013) and their entanglement in trade that extended from the Indian Ocean to Tibet (Sigley, 2010; Tapp, 2010). Forsyth and Michaud (2011, page 15) thus argue that 'the livelihoods of ethnic minorities are best understood on a transnational basis in relation to the existence of cultural and trading links across borders'. Borders that were long fuzzily defined, and little policed, became a cause for state concern (Norins, 1939; Siguret, 1937) amid a need to define, fix and govern these groups. The Guomintang government of the 40s for instance banned identity categories based on language for fear of ethnonationalist cross border links – demanding groups be categorised as belonging to a place (Mullaney, 2010, page 75). The touristic governance of ethnic groups in China continues that history of defining, fixing and suppressing fluidity.

These trends of valorising a notion of 'local' bounded community and alternative environmental values have driven a type of indigenous tourism that sees local cultures fusing both ethnic and ecological attributes into exploitable resources (Swain, 2011, page 175). This enables ethnic minorities to mobilise an 'ecological legitimacy' (Tomaselli, 2012) that is a novel development in China where there was little tradition of valorising an 'ecologically noble savage' (Hathaway, 2012, pages 37-8). Until the 1990s "sacred lands", "sacred forests" and 'old growth' forest were as likely to be associated with pejoratives of feudal superstition s*(mixin)* (Hathaway, 2013, pages 129-33). But now cultural diversity has been linked with biodiverse environments through the work of key scientists working on peoples like the Dai whose Dragon Hills are seen as aligning expressing an evolutionary alignment of religious and sacred conservation practices. In so doing an equivalent category to indigenous people is having to be invented for China, which regards all its peoples as equally indigenous. Pejorative terms like 'mountain dweller' (*tu zhu ren*) are being reclaimed as markers of what elsewhere is termed indigeneity (Hathaway, 2012; 2013)*.*

Producing the ethnic Other in China

The production of a localised and ecologised notion of minorities, rather than 'indigenous' peoples, has a long history in China. The People's Republic of China has 56 official *minzu* or 'ethnicities'. The largest, the Han, account for 92% of the population (in the 2010 census), with the remaining 55 *shaoshu minzu* (minority ethnicities) largely scattered around the geographical and economic periphery of Greater China but concentrated in the three western provinces. Of those Yunnan has the greatest variety with some 25 ethnic groups officially recognised as resident minorities, comprising just over 33% of its population of 45 million (Guo, 2014). 'Ethnic tourism' accounted for 30% of the province's total foreign currency earnings (Tapp, 2010, page 101) from 2.2 million international tourists in 2007, but much more significantly it attracts 90 million domestic tourist visits (Mattison, 2010).

Most ethnic minorities are economically disempowered, with 46 of all *shaoshu minzu* having lower GDP per head than the Han average ($38, 923). The peoples at the centre of this paper in Yunnan are economically poor – with GDP per capita for the Miao $22,898, Yi $21,098, Dai $19,512 and Hani $19,507 (Guo, 2014) -- and are underrepresented in professional and technical grade jobs within the province. Within rural areas, Han villagers often have ingrained notions of their superiority where a Han woman marrying a minority man is seen as losing prestige (Fang, 2010). Sinicisation is also a longstanding, though uneven, process, where for instance in Xishuangbanna Han groups comprised 2% of the population in 1950, but are now over 33% (Tapp, 2010). Indeed to this day

> 'The state deploys Han Chinese culture and the Han themselves to modernize and civilize China's border regions and peoples... traditional Chinese institutions, beliefs, and practices associated with the Han are celebrated as touchstones of morality and identity, insofar as they encourage identification with the nation and adherence to state-sanctioned ideals of modernity.'(McCarthy, 2010, page 158)

Minority cultures were 'defined', or one might say created, by the *minzu shibie* or 'ethnic classification' project of the 1950s which deployed the four criteria outlined by Stalin for a

'nationality': common territory, language, economy, and psychological makeup 'expressed in a common culture' (White, 2010). The researchers struggled since many apparent minorities did not meet those criteria (Mullaney, 2010, page 69-90). A self-identification process had resulted in some 400 apparent groups rendering ethnic identity 'illegible' to the state (Mullaney, 2010, page 35, 37). The state needed to create useful interlocutors for itself and so it effected an amalgamation of putative groups. This definitional process overlaid a Confucian judgement about minorities' of lack of civilisation with a Marxist social teleology where, 'traditional' ethnic groups represented earlier stages of social evolution (Blum, 2001; Mullaney, 2010, pages 72, 83-4; Tapp, 2010). Fixed and discrete groups were produced out of shifting and overlapping patterns of social and cultural phenomena. Those fixed official groupings do not always (still) reflect local senses of self-identity (Rack, 2005).

The state's intervention produced what has been called a self-Orientalism where an exoticised (and feminised) ethnic Other provides the foil to a modern (and masculine) Han self identity (Schein, 1997). These ethnic group identities have become the modality through which poor, indigenous peoples have to and can (sometimes) make claims on the state and articulate their interests. The intersection of legal rights (of language or autonomy), the policy apparatus to address rural poverty, and the celebration of ethnicity, form a technology of governmentality through which ethnic minorities can be addressed but also through which they can act:

> 'to obtain representation within the state, ethnic minorities readily accept their own
> identities, each being essentially and authentically distinctive from other groups. While the
> state enjoys both clarity and stability that this seemingly submissive attitude offers to the
> management of ethnic affairs, the state loses its monopoly over the politics of
> representation' (Shih, 2007, page 30)

Minorities deploy the same strategic essentialism Tomaselli (2012) notes in cultural tourism more generally. The state's current focus on these groups is through marketisation which transforms

ethnicity into a resource alongside scenery and apparent biodiversity (Swain, 2011, page 173). The preservation, reproduction and display of cultural distinctiveness become the key devices for development and incorporation into the market economy. A cartography of ethnic identity is reinscribed through very standardised tourist itineraries. It is worth emphasising that there could have been other tourist patterns. For instance, the provincial capital of Kunming is a thousand year old city which had remarkable Han vernacular architecture meaning it was listed as one of only 24 renowned historic cultural cities (*lishi menghua mingcheng*) in 1982. But Kunming's built heritage has been pretty comprehensively razed in rebuilding the city as a modern provincial capital in the last twenty years (Hathaway, 2012; Zhang, 2006). Rapid market development has been more violent to tangible heritage than the Cultural Revolution was; the State Administration for Cultural Heritage announced in 2009 that over 30,000 places on the 1982 list of cultural heritage sites no longer exist (Sigley, 2010, page 533). In that context of wholesale erasure, the strategic utility of ethnic identity for (self-)preservation should not be underestimated. The effect then has been to collude in specific ways of valorising ethnic difference as the opposite of modernisation, through:

> 'a trope of the minority other as a counter, and perhaps even an antidote, to the apparent existential dilemma of post-Mao modern cosmopolitan Han citizenship, whether minorities became framed as an exotic other, a sexualised other, a freer in spirit other or a closer to nature other. This representational and discursive move in Chinese state and popular discourse coincided with the birth of ethnic tourism in China, especially in Yunnan, precisely at a juncture when a leisure class with a desire for travel was emerging' (White, 2010, page 151)

The rural becomes reinscribed as the other to urban cosmopolitan China, and the repository of national values (Chio, 2011) because they are 'backward' (*luohuo*, literally "behind the times") (Hathaway, 2013). The result is a prominent and bowdlerised version of ethnic identities being produced through a set of touristic institutions like museum folk villages that focus on strength,

wildness and primitive simplicity as the attributes of ethnic minorities (Shih, 2007). Minorities come to be depicted as possessing and offering simpler virtues to a mobile cosmopolitan subject. So in the case of the Mosuo people around Lake Lugu in Northern Yunnan, although not officially recognised as a *minzu*, they have won the right to known as a people in no small part because they have become distinct objects of tourism. However, although on the one hand tourists may promote and give value to traditional customs 'on the other, tourists also view Mosuo customs as 'backward'' (Mattison, 2010, page 160). Even as ethnicity is valorised so the freighting of it with assumptions of backwardness persists.

Chinese traditions of valuing nature

Chinese traditions have a general view of nature that emphasises 'harmony' between people and nature rather than the 'Yellowstone model' of a pristine and untouched nature. Indeed the notion of harmony has been used deliberately against such a model (Hathaway, 2013), and with practical reason, since across China there are an average of 10,000 people living in each nature reserve and many more outside depending on it for resources (Coggins, 2003; Grumbine, 2010). Valuing harmony of people and environment can be found in Chinese 'nature paintings':

> 'Unlike a Western tradition that tried to capture a pure nature apart from human beings, people form an inevitable part of the Chinese landscape. Rather than showing a natural world apart from human interference, these paintings tend to depict a flow of energy that runs through both humans and environment. This cosmic energy – *qi* in Chinese – characterizes everything in the world, constantly' (Weller, 2006, page 22)

Classical *shanshui* (literally 'mountains and water') painting, does not present an image of what the painter has seen in nature, so much as what they have thought about nature (Xu et al., 2014). Assembled sets of 'views' (*jing*) were shaped into itineraries– as in the collection of 23 delicate line

drawn views of sites in Yunnan with texts by Tchao (1924) or *bajing* (eight views) genre that added four lines of poetry over the painting (Li et al., 2010) - and focused as much on histories and stories as nature. James Cahill suggests that reaffirming 'received information and recognition of named places seem to have somewhat supplanted firsthand observation of untouched nature' in constituting 'good' travelling (cited in Nyíri, 2006, page 8). Stories about places have now moved from the elite literati into films and novels that shape a romanticised experience of fictional places (Notar, 2006; Ryan et al., 2009).

It is not perhaps surprising then that studies find it 'is very difficult to distinguish whether it is the natural landscape or prior cultural knowledge that motivates Chinese tourists to travel to areas of natural beauty' (Xu et al., 2013, page119-120). Viewers can talk more readily, and at greater length than western tourists, about stories and associations with places 'because landscape memories and intangible cultural heritage are important mediators of Chinese landscape appreciation. The poems, philosophies, teachings and stories embedded in landscapes … influence Chinese perception and cognition of natural landscapes' (ibid). Figurative or metaphorical thinking, exemplified in say naming mountains after shapes of animals, is widespread. Indeed apprehending the landscape without knowing the cultural referents is seen as deficient, and instead the 'good visitor' is not the intrepid one seeking a transcendent encounter with nature but one who learns the canonical representations of the sites visited (Nyíri, 2006, page 64). Chinese tourists thus lack a taboo on human intervention, instead wanting wildernesses tamed into cameo views, experienced as harmony with nature and preferably with song and wine to intensify feelings of affinity (Nyíri, 2006, page 67). 'Since the Chinese way of thinking is a relational thinking, they often tend to think about and learn things in the way that things can be associated with them. There is no pure object world that needs to be cared about'(Xu et al., 2014). There is then no deep problem experienced by tourists when a cable car enables access to a sacred Daoist mountain (Ryan et al., 2012) nor with 7000 bed hotels and concrete paths to go to the 'scenic spots to see daybreak at sites immortalized

in poems' (Xu et al., 2014). Eco-tourism and commercialised sightseeing practices, that in the West are driven by distinct values, are mingled in China.

Any analysis has to recognise China's variegated cultural and heritage thinking philosophies about nature. Daoism's fundamental precept is of learning from 'naturalness' and the harmonious holism of sky, people and earth (Chan, 2009) along with the integration of humans with the world's vital energy flows of *qi* and sacred mountains play a significant role in that (Kohn, 2009). The resonance theory (of *yin* and *yang* harmony) in Confucian versions of order and symmetry is another powerful strand (Weller, 2006). Confucianists like Zhuangzi stated that 'People with high morals live in harmony with nature and would not hurt it' (Xu et al., 2012, page 4). It is not surprising then to find that Chinese visitors to natural parks do have an interest in nature and at least weakly environmental values (Cheng et al., 2011). We have to acknowledge the plurality and power of 'enduring cultural patterns pertaining to wild animals in the many guises that they have assumed in rural Chinese culture: food, quarry, medicine, bestial terrors, destroyers of crops, bearers of magic, and, most recently, protected natural resources' (Coggins, , page 9). We should not assume that these plural value systems automatically mean an overriding conservation ethos for mainstream Chinese visitors. The symbolic charge and value attached to many flora and fauna does not always drive an ethic of conservation. As Coggins wryly notes they also currently drive unethical trades since 'the cultural values that have developed around wild animals through the millennia of Chinese history largely explain the demands that Chinese consumers now place on wildlife populations throughout Asia and Africa' (2003, page 5).

If you look hard enough, you can find philosophical sayings taking every position from celebrating reciprocal flows of energy to 'attack and conquer' engineering (Weller, 2006, page 24). That latter attitude persists in the Maoist exhortation for all able bodied people to transform a resistant natural world, which it suggested formed an impediment to China's modernization (Coggins, 2003, page 13). Party led attacks on rituals and sacred spaces were seen as necessary purging of old superstitions

and preserving old trees was tantamount to preserving 'old beliefs' (Mueggler, 2001). It is remarkable that 'from being a harsh critic of Western environmentalism' the Chinese state has moved being what has been termed, an 'environmental state' (Hathaway, 2013; Lang, 2002, page 8). Among the ethnic minorities are many 'animist' traditions (as we shall see among the Hani and the Tibetan groups) where a great deal of concern has sought to link local forms of geopiety with either historic conservation norms or use them to justify and promote conservation practices (Hakkenberg, 2008; Jiao et al., 2012). The confluence of these different forms of nature ethics has been described as the emergence of a provincial level 'ecological state' or 'ecological capitalism' (Coggins and Zeren, 2014; Moseley and Mullen, 2014; Zinda, 2014).

Four Modes of Producing Biocultural resources.

Mobilising Geopiety, 'harmony' and landscape care ethics

After catastrophic floods in the mid90s the central government identified extensive logging in the headwaters of the great rivers in South West China as a major contributing factor (Grumbine, 2010, page 65; Lang, 2002; Weyerhaeuser et al., 2005). It therefore banned logging. The areas affected then had to look for alternative sources of income. One response was to create the Great Shangri-La Ecological Region totaling 30 million square kilometers across Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai. This was the context in which the town of Zhongdian, in Yunnan, created a sensation when, in 2001, it formally changed its name to "Shangri-la" —the mythical paradise of the Himalayas (Hillman, 2003). For an imaginative geography rooted and located in Western tastes the question is how well it plays to an increasingly domestic audience (Cater, 2001, page 50). Moreover the landscape of North West Yunnan is deeply imprinted with congeries of ethical values, as on top of Western novels, there are imageries in the National Geographic from Joseph Rock, the American botanist, and mutual entanglements of global science and local sacred epistemologies (Hakkenberg, 2008).

The Yunnan Great Rivers Project seeks to catalogue local sacred knowledges capitalising on the correlation of sacred mountains and biodiversity. This mobilisation of local ethics of geopiety risks essentialising Tibetan values against Han Chinese (Hakkenberg, 2008) and underplaying how animist landscapes are ontologically different from, and not always commensurate with, scientific conservation practice (Coggins and Zeren, 2014, page 213).

Environmental revaluations are then being overlain on already complexly semiotically coded landscapes. Values that simultaneously valorise and denigrate ethnic minority cultural knowledge and practice. Looking at ecological issues in Yunnan this leads Litzinger to note:

> North-west Yunnan is thus a world where the European colonial, the Chinese imperial, the socialist modern and the global collide, where fiction has been turned into fact, where nature meets culture in fantasies of indigenous stewardship, and where the biological and ecological sciences are being mobilized to save the region and save the planet. (2004, page 494)

There has been a romanticised reappreciation of ethnic minority cultures, living in harmony with nature (a repeated slogan in marketing materials). In part this returns to a celebration of indigenous forms of geopiety and animism long used to mark out minorities as backward. However, this is one that binds them to the soil (and the water and the plants) in powerfully localised identities. This forms part of a marketisation where ethnicity is another renewable resource (Litzinger, 2004) linked and locked to habitats. For plans to turn Yunnan into a "Great Cultural Province" and a "Green Economy Province" they come to be seen as resources (Xu et al., 2005). Indeed the (atheist) state is comfortable with religion and local difference seen through a developmentalist lens where things like Buddhism transmute from being backward superstition, or dangerous cross national sympathy, to being a resource for economic development (McCarthy, 2010).

The development of Shangri La was accompanied by the building of scores of Tibetan farmhouses around the town, whose ornate styles exaggerated Tibetan architecture and furnishings, and which hosted Tibetan festivals and feasts with a hotch potch of costumes, food and performances picked randomly for their 'glitter' effect but which owed much to stereotypes of Tibetan (and generally minority) drinking culture (Kolås 2008). Local identity is deployed but is geographically stretched so dance groups boasting a manager from a 'respected' Tibetan family, and Tibetan performers selected so 'the young men are all handsome and the girls are all beautiful' who are thus authorised to perform songs from all five western Chinese provinces.

Several world heritage applications from China have treated 'cultural and natural heritage as a single unitary construct' despite pressure from UNESCO to treat them as separate classifications and thus either reduce human impact on places selected for their 'natural heritage' or conserve human artefacts from 'natural' processes in cultural heritage sites (Li et al., 2008). The concept of people and nature in harmony similarly revalorises animist religion for the less often studied Honghe Hani terraced field system in Southern Yunnan. Reading the application to declare it a world heritage site[2] the focus on 'harmony' is apparent: 'Hani villages at the heritage site reflect the worship of and conformity to nature and utilization of nature, fully manifesting the residential environment design concept advocating the harmony between human and nature.' It goes on to explicitly link two systems – one ecological, the 'unique and integrated ecological system which comprises the forests on the hilltop, the terraced fields and villages on the hillsides, and the water system at the foot of the hill' and the other 'the ethnic cultural system which comprises tangible cultural heritages including the villages, dwellings and buildings for production, the protector woods of the villages, irrigation works and road sign steles, etc., and intangible cultural heritages such as the traditional production and life styles, traditional custom and fete activities, and knowledge systems passed down orally.' It is the linkage of the two systems that is used to make the claim for world heritage

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[2] The full application and adjudication can be accessed at http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1111/ and http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2013/whc13-37com-8B1inf-en.pdf (last accessed 10 Dec 2014)

status 'the unique twin systems of Honghe Hani Terraced Fields i.e. the ecological system and ethnic cultural system reflect the interrelationship between human activities and natural environment. These two systems manifest the unique integration of agriculture civilization and natural ecology as well as the integral relationship between agricultural production activities and human social lives.' And indeed we should celebrate the collective efforts of the Hani people who over 1300 years created 12,670Ha of irrigated terraces climbing the 2800m up the mountain side in 3,700 steps using 4,600 water channels, cultivating 47 different rice variants (Jiao et al., 2012). These terraced fields are 'envisioned as both ethnic and natural at the same time. As products of human intervention requiring specialized knowledge and constant maintenance in order to function properly as agricultural land, terraced fields straddle the distinction between natural and cultural' (Chio, 2013, page 149). Crucially the headwaters were seen as being conserved by sacred forests and beliefs in tree spirits.

The ICOMOS verdict was in favour of listing because of 'the exceptional way in which the terraced landscape reflects a specific interaction with the environment mediated by integrated farming and water management systems and underpinned by socio-economic-religious systems that express the dual relationship between people and gods and between individuals and community'. The appeal is to preserving and valuing the Hani sacred landscape where the village gate (*lanlkang)* separates the human (*pucang*) and wild, nonhuman world of spirits and gods (*boalcang*) (Xu et al., 2005). The agronomic work cycle is based around a religious calendar and a profound understanding of environmental conditions such as landforms, soil conditions, vegetation types, and hydrology (Jiao et al., 2012, page 252). Such world views are now valued (as cultural services) for conservational effects rather than seen as impeding progress (Xu et al., 2005).

Surveying current tourist adverts for the terraces, they offer the experience of 'distinctive, unique farming patterns, unusual lifestyle and intact traditional architecture' in 'ethnic villages'. There has been funding to preserve and modernise the thatched roof 'beehive' housing (Chio, 2013). On offer

too is the 'hospitality of the unsophisticated villagers'. And yet in the official programme of festivals that visitors may witness, the 4 Hani festivals are now augmented by 12 from other ethnic groups from across Yunnan. And in some showcase 'Ethnic Cultural and Ecological Tourism Villages' (*Minsu Wenhua Shengtai Lüyoucun*) totem poles were erected at the public squares, although they are not part of the Hani culture (Gu et al., 2012). The terraces can be appreciated from the designated viewing spots or whilst on the three tiers of concrete terraces with attached restaurants positioned to allow the viewing of the setting and sun over the shoulder of the mountain. The framing of experience through canonised scenic spots is very tight with a uniform kind of 'cultural grammar, … enforcing a kind of narrative uniformity and ensuring that the affective and sensual experiences of the places as their narratives of history and geography conform to the state endorsed "structure of feeling" ' (Nyíri, 2006, page 78). But for a very poor rural community, revenue from views and the photography it inspires is quite small (Graburn, 2015). Indeed it creates temptations to 'push grain for water' and retain the flooded paddies out of season for their scenic appeal – and thus upset the downstream water cycle (Gu et al., 2012, page 57).

Enculturing nature:

As noted previously, Chinese visitors tend to relate to natural phenomena through cultural referents and narratives. This is perhaps most starkly illustrated for geotourism, the marketing of 'natural' geologic phenomena. Within Yunnan a key geotourism site is Shilin Stone Forest. This is a karst landscape with the eroded stones standing proud of the current land surface in striking patterns, jostling together over a large expanse of land. It also happens to be occupied by a branch of the Yi ethnic minority. The state now supports their traditional animism in order to (re-)inculcate the (traditionally spiritual) love of trees among the Yi (Zhou and Lu, 2006). To gain world heritage status, in line with ecotourism precepts, the site should not merely conserve the landscape but educate visitors; however, any scientific message is largely ineffective (Xu et al., 2012). Instead the site is

narrated through the traditional Yi poem about a woman called Ashima. There are variants on the story but the essence is that a beautiful young woman is taken from her betrothed by a wealthy landowner and forced to be his bride. She resists, and dies eloping with her fiancée transmuting into part of the stone landscape. The story is massively present at the site – all prescribed routes lead up to the rock supposed to be her fossilised self, whose outline supposedly resembles a young Yi woman in traditional dress. This is explained by the guides, who are all young Yi women, all wearing traditional style clothes who all introduce themselves as 'Ashima'. They narrate the site explicitly 'saying 'Chinese landscape is seen through stories and myths' and setting up guessing games as to who can recognise 'the elephant and turtle', the 'drinking turtle' or 'the eagle' in the stone formations. So obvious is the coding that when squeezing between rocks a Chinese visitor greeted an oncoming guide with 'Hello Ashima' and a chuckle, and indeed playful responses to the site are common (Huang and Liu, 2008, page 221). It is impossible to walk around the Stone Forest without seeing signs of Ashima. It is though a tale that clothes the landscape in different meanings. For early communist purposes it became a morality tale of self-sacrifice resisting the landowner classes (Swain, 2005). That structure is so clichéd that young Chinese today immediately ask if the poem is a Party inspired story.

It is also the case that the local village of the Yi was demolished (2013-2014) just behind hoardings that screened it from tourists whizzing past on golf buggies listening to Ashima. The locals are being rehoused in a new development and it is a matter of debate whether the allocation is generous, or the new village soulless. The Yi are no longer allowed to farm the site, though the 400 or so who work on the site as guides and performers point out it is also rather easier work than farming. The poem however eroticised and rusticated the Yi through the youth's nightly gatherings for singing, dancing, and making love, and emphasised a simple life, through its "simple unadorned language," the Sani people's "simple written script" (Swain, 2005, page 248).

Valorising simplicity

The rise of an affluent domestic market has led to an upsurge in domestic demand for products associated with qualities such as simplicity and naturalness. However, demand for organic food supplies is mostly driven by consumers seeking benefits in terms of quality and health, partly in response to scandals and concerns about pollution and contaminated food, rather than concerns for the environment (Thøgersen and Zhou, 2012; Yin et al., 2010). An ethic of concern for the environment can be seen in the burgeoning *nongjiale* tourism (literally 'farmhouse joy') which emerged as guesthouses selling nostalgic rustic or ethnic minority foods and back to basic dining in suburbs of big cities (Wu, 2014) and then broadened into taking lodgings in farm guesthouses run by peasant families. This form of rural tourism has been booming 'not only as a new style of holiday making among the Chinese urban middle-class, but also as a new form of private enterprise among millions of Chinese peasants' (Park, 2008).

Rural tourism is seen to both celebrate and promote local cultural and natural landscapes, support rural livelihoods and promote sustainability (Zhou and Lu, 2006). The communist party journal suggested using tourism to help peasants (*yi you zhu nong*) but in so doing it reinscribes: 'understandings of rural and urban, as categories of place, and their value in the Chinese nation-state. By relying upon metaphors of geography and the state, discourses of distance both reinstated the rural, as utterly central to the nation's development, and substantiated differences between the rural and the urban for the satisfaction of urban tourist desires.' (Chio, 2011, page 65)

However words like *nongmin* (peasants) and *nongcun* (countryside) are freighted by judgements on 'backwardness':

> China's rurality has been constructed from two ambivalent layers. The first is a romanticized layer carrying the signifiers of countryside idyll, greenness, healthy lifestyles, simplicity, family, home, and familial intimacy, etc., and the other is a stigmatized layer

carrying those of stupidity (*ben*), underdevelopment (*bugou fazhan*), backwardness (*luohou*), lack of civilization (*meiyou wenming*), low degree of cultural quality (*suzhi di*), low education (*wenhua shuipingdi*), and lack of hygienic mentality (*meiyou weisheng guannian*) or dirty (*zhang*). (Park, 2008, page 247)

Alongside those associations goes what Anagnost (2004) calls 'the corporeal politics of quality', judging people as lacking *suzhi* (quality). Those hosting rural tourists may indeed then be placed in a conflicting position that the personal attributes attracting tourists are also shameful signifiers of 'low quality'. Thus many farmers (mis-)promote their houses with modern comforts and owners aspire to modernise and rebuild their traditional courtyard houses in ways that actually reduce their appeal to tourists (Park, 2008, online early). A similar dissonance emerges in the international popularity of ethnic 'wild foods' (like fern, kudzu, and osmunda) that were once known as famine foods and remain etched in rural memories from the Great Famine (Mueggler, 2001; Wu, 2003). For urban Chinese consumers positive associations about their nutritional merits conflict with associations with 'low quality' minority populations. A related situation is found in the tea producing landscapes in Yunnan, where commercial monoculture had been pushed to 'modernise' production and displaced traditional mixed holdings. However while tea prices generally have fallen, the prices for *guchalin* (ancient tea forest) tea picked from trees long established and interposed with other trees are around 4 times higher (Hung, 2013). So what was 'backward' and 'inefficient' has been revalorised as 'authentic', and yet bodies must remain 'local' and without quality to yield value.

Delinking ethnic production and consumption

There is a veritable cottage (or bamboo house[3]) industry assessing the effects of tourism in both revitalising and eroding ethnic culture by rendering them 'inauthentic'. The most extreme case may be the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics where 'Ode to motherland' was sung by 56

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[3] Bamboo houses are the hall mark of the ethnic Dai in Xishuangbanna

children representing each ethnicity – but actually they were all Han children wearing clothes that represented the stereotype of each ethnicity. When challenged on this the official response was 'it is typical for Chinese performers to wear different apparel from different ethnic groups, there is nothing special about it' (Xie, 2011, page 18). More subtly if we return to our guide Ashima, or other ethnic performers, the seasonal festivals are now weekly and the costumes polyester. The performances are often generic, with ethnic minority performers working in recreated 'folk villages', in hotels and show bars. In the far south west of Yunnan in the rain forest National Park of Xishuangbanna this has perhaps gone further than elsewhere:

> 'Much of the exoticism on display is, quite simply, kitsch—state and business promotion of Dai culture has produced some profoundly inauthentic products, including daily celebrations of the ostensibly annual "water-splashing festival" unmoored from seasonal context, staged displays of Dai women bathing in the Lancang River... The large-scale song and dance performances held nightly in Jinghong embody a Vegas-meets-Bangkok aesthetic (if it can be called that) rather than traditional Dai sensibilities' (McCarthy, 2010, page 166)

Performances travel far from their roots, as with the 'Water splashing ritual' being performed at the Hani Honghe terraces. Not only do the performances travel but so too do the performers. Looking at the village of Xi Cun Bulan in Xishuangbanna, Wang et al. (2013, pages 191-2) found around two-thirds of the villagers were travelling around performing cultural shows in cities and tourist sites elsewhere in China. However, there are inevitable changes top both performances and performers. Xie (2003, 2011) notes how dances become picked out to symbolise different ethnicities and then undergo changes to popularise their performance such as Dai dancers endlessly performing a wedding dance that includes the *peng pigu* ('bump butts'). Such sexualised imaginings are prevalent in looking at minority peoples, where the matrilineal patterns of temporary 'walking marriages' amongst the Mosuo on Lake Lugu (Shih, 2009) are romanticised into a vision of Arcadian free love

that leads to tea houses with sexualised names selling the possibility of a sexual encounter (Qian et al., 2012; Walsh, 2005). Visits to Mosuo houses are now often hosted by Han women in Mosuo clothes (Yang, 2012) and in 'folk villages' the workers are often a mix of minorities and Han performers (Yang, 2011). What gets performed is then a mis-en scene of ethnicity, but one which performers see brings higher income and better working conditions than other jobs in the villages (Notar, 2006; Wang et al., 2013). Nyiri (2006, page 80) argues that if for China authenticity has not been a concern of the modern, then so 'theming' and staging is not necessarily postmodern and thus cultural fixing and development may not be opposed categories. And in this context then there is the ethical dilemma of people engaged in the reflexive capitalisation of themselves through their own interpretation of ethnic identity as articulated through touristic artefacts (Doorne et al., 2003, page 2; Oakes, 2005; Tomaselli, 2012).

> 'Commodification is neither possible to avoid and is a positive process to publicize ethnic cultures. The process of cultural evolution associated with tourism does not necessarily break down a place-based sense of identity nor render it inauthentic. Instead, it may become an important factor in the ongoing construction of ethnic identity' (Xie, 2011, page 143)

The process has since 2002 often been promoted as part of policies for "Tourism- Assisting the Poor" (*fu pin lv you)* (Zeng and Ryan, 2012). However, the most promoted site in Xishuangbanna, the Dai Garden, with a concrete performance arena and daily shows built around a genuine Buddhist temple, was developed by a Han investor (Yang and Wall, 2009a), and most analyses point to the control of tourism by tour operators. The resulting sites offer stock products and itineraries amongst which tour guides chose those that offer the best opportunities to earn commission (Dai et al., 2012; Li, 2008; Yang and Wall, 2008). Nor do the poorest always have the capacity to respond to plans to showcase and market traditional arts and handicrafts. So when locals traditionally 'farm rice and rubber, and lack either the time or skills to engage in traditional performance and craft production

on a commercial scale[, p]roject developers have advertised throughout the region for artists, performers, and craftspeople willing to relocate' (McCarthy, 2010, page 169).

Raised incomes in these rural and poor locations fund shifts in consumption patterns by the villagers. These are often depicted again as challenging the fixed senses of static authentic identities. Thus in the Dai Garden complex, the management have been trying hard to stop newly affluent villagers replacing bamboo houses with concrete Han style houses (Li, 2008; Yang and Wall, 2009c). This clearly conflicts with most tourists' expectations. The return of migrants who have performed in roaming dance troops is producing new incomes and patterns of consumption raising an issue of seeing the ethnic communities not only as producers (of handicrafts and cultures) but also as consumers who define themselves through their own consumption practices. It is overly simplistic to think of becoming consumers as necessarily sinicizing or urbanizing (Schein, 2005, page 150). Instead new material cultures are taking a role in reshaping what had been the constraining small places (*difang*) of minority social life 'characterized not only by geographic remoteness but also by confinement of outlook' (Schein, 2005, page 156). Indeed Schein argues it is creating precisely reflexive styles of consumption where traditional dress is hybridised with new forms that reposition their self-identity from simple, marginal and backward. In contrast to the static positions and the bio-cultural fusing of habitat and heritage that dominate policy and thinking around ethnic tourism, Bruner (2005, page 18) compares development rather more to improvisational theatre where both tourists and locals engage in a coproduction where each takes account of the other in an ever shifting contested and evolving touristic borderzone of engagement. This borderzone is constructed for sure in villages and so forth, but also in hotels, in performance arenas, in shops and more.

Concluding: Ethics in action, conservation and minority development in South West China

The broad upshot of current revalorisations of minority culture, and their link to the environment is that in place of years of assimilation and denigration, cultural and ecological identities are no longer one of the four 'olds' (Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas) that were to be eradicated in modernisation. While most discussions focus upon authenticity and commodification, this paper has focused on the mobilisation of environmental ethics. It is perhaps too easy to accept the notion of environmental concern as a 'middle way' of 'harmony' in a Chinese idiom that incidentally binds minorities to land, but also allows commercially advantageous mobilisation of ethnic customs. There is a duplicitous outcome of both celebrating the putative environmental values of ethnic minorities and also denigrating them as backward.

Instead of a governance of identity via a political-juridical technology of ethnic definition, the form of governance is now also partly via the market through tourism. Tourism forms a technology of valuation positioning both newly affluent tourists and minority groups. What is clear is there is an ongoing and upfront set of valuations about 'good' and 'bad' people and the attributes and behaviours that decide that. The notions of ecotourism as educative and leading to local empowerment largely do not fit. As Sharpley (2009) argues if there is to be sustainable tourism, it has to be found in mainstream tourism practices and one can add therefore mainstream values. There is an undoubted valuing of the environment and cultural difference encoded in the current tourist surge. Tourism operates on a terrain that is about valuing and ethics, experienced now as a form of in person and individualised consumption and service labour. Then 'ethical tourism' operates in a way that, just as in ethical trade, it may reify categories of difference ''between the consuming self and the producing other'' (Neve et al., 2008, page 9). In as much as minorities become commodities to consume, tourists become symbols of modern lives in 'a mutual seduction in which both parties try to be the Other that is desired, and each tries to find him- or herself in the Other' (Walsh, 2005, page 454).

It is not a simple matter of creating a scale of how 'ethical' or not tourist values are, nor how strongly motivated tourists are (cf McKercher & du Cros 2003), Chinese values have different parameters. Development and preservation are not seen as opposing categories, nor are nature and human use. Rusticity and social status have a more complex relationship. The simple and rustic is attracting a form of value but it is only bestowed through the presence of higher status tourists. In this position the flexible environmental valuing of 'harmony' permits the turning of indigenous nature-culture relations into bio-cultural resources for tourism. The minority groups' links to land fixes them in place, socially and spatially, and also allows new values to be assigned. The state can incorporate them through a sanctioned set of religious beliefs seen as environmental ethics, or cultural services delivering environmental benefits.

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