"Tourist Landscape Narratives and Visuality at a Pilgrimage/World Heritage Site in West China."

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For the panel 'Tourism and Landscape Narratives', in the conference 'Thinking through Tourism,' Association for Social Anthropology of the U.K. and Commonwealth, London Metropolitan University, Friday, April 13

Tourism in any form (religious, historical, nature, etc.) proceeds through landscapes with stories attached to them. In China, at least, the landscape of tourism has two aspects: sites good to see tend to be spatially grouped by tourist agencies and local government for convenient visiting; and each site, in a more spontaneous and complex process, comes to be internally subdivided into places worth attention, or way-stations. Attached to each site and way-station is not just a name but meanings developed under the influence of past visitors that take the form of more or less developed narratives which powerfully persuade. Tourguides or guidebooks may communicate some of these imagined narratives to tourists. Furthermore, the ordered movement from site to site and within sites also creates a *lived* landscape narrative in the mind of the tourist, mingling with those pre-existing *imagined* narratives.

Because meaning is produced by and for different groups, a site and its way-stations may develop a series of rival narratives, each of which suits a different clientele. This is especially true in an ancient site that is still in use, attracting old-style pilgrims of more than one religious affiliation, nature-lovers and ethnotourists and others. This paper examines several sites in western China with layered representations superimposed by Tibetan and Chinese pilgrims and modern-day tourists. My main focus, Huanglong (Yellow Dragon) in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Region, has been a World Heritage site only since 1992 but a pilgrimage center since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). With another World Heritage site, Jiuzhaigou, and the walled Songpan city, it forms a triangle with the tourist town of Chuanzhusi and the monument to the Red Army, which fought near here in the Long March. The Huanglong site is run by a Management Bureau separate from Songpan county; it consists of scenic spots, temples and other way-stations linked by broad pathways over a steeply sloping

five-mile-long valley of travertine pools, caves and waterfalls. Narratives associated with the site and its way-stations not only suggest contrasting meanings to visitors depending on who they are, but spell out power relations among Tibetans, local Han Chinese, Han Chinese tourists and local authorities involving religion, ethnicity, and environmentalism.

In this paper, based on fieldwork conducted with Xiaofei Kang,[1] I will examine some imagined narratives and then the role of the visual in lived tourist narratives. There are three kinds of tourist narratives which I shall call patriotic, environmentalist and sentimental. I shall show that these landscape narratives are strongly visual in basis, though minimally developed by comparison to the narratives and rituals of long-time pilgrims. Earlier research discovered that certain practices of the pilgrims of different ethnicities went along with their narratives: Han Chinese pilgrims, for example, take home holy water from a stalactited cave where the man Huanglong perfected himself into a god, and offer incense at the Daoist temple where his statue stands (Sutton 2005 ms). I shall suggest below that what tourists do at the site is very like their narratives in its essentially visual basis. They are no different from pilgrims in trying to appropriate the power of the site and its way-stations and in the process restate their social identity, or create their "subject position," but the tourist emphasis on the visual, in narratives they tell and practices they perform, suits both the busy one-time visitor, and China's contemporary urban culture, and seems to impose greater conformity than that enjoyed by pilgrims and locals. Yet it will be argued that the individual tourist does have some latitude for agency.

Landscape Narratives for Tourists and Others

Four older types of "landscape narrativity" should first be distinguished from the three characteristic of tourists. Still powerful for many visitors are sacred narratives told by Tibetan and Han pilgrims. Tibetans focus on the White Shell Mountain which they personify as a sacred power surrounded by attendant

[1] This paper is based on ongoing research with Professor Kang from 2003 to 2005 partially supported by a [U.S.] NEH grant (2004-5). It also draws on a study tour of the Qiang region in 2002, a conference tour of Yunnan in 2005, as well as my earlier research on the history of the Hmong (Miao) region in west Hunan.

lakes; their stories dwell on the privileged status of lamas past and present, describing how certain lamas sanctified themselves and left sacred objects at different stations, to be found by other lamas. The entire site is seen to be sacred and powerful, including even rocks, stones and bits of earth. By contrast the Han Chinese pilgrims focus their attention on the Yellow Dragon, an agricultural fertility god, and their stories tell how he perfected himself as a priest in the cave under the present temple and produced or became the yellow travertine outcrops that run down the valley. All variants of the extant narratives, Tibetan and Chinese, describe beneficial transformation, which the pilgrims try to achieve themselves, in a small way, as a result of their regular visits (Sutton 2005 ms.).[2]

Several modern political narratives, also sacred in their way, have arisen in the People's Republic. At Chuanzhusi, 15 miles from Huanglong, a giant hill-top soldier's statue, raised rifle in hand, and several groupings of faux-stone figures at its base celebrate the martyrs of the Long March (1934-35), which ensured the survival of the Communist Red Army fleeing Nationalist encirclement. Parties of school children and others come to visit, and local events pay homage to the soldiers' sacrifices. The narratives of the Long March are currently relevant in two senses: they dwell on the help given by the local minority nationalities to the Red Army; and they continue to legitimize the Communist Party's monopoly of power, in Aba as elsewhere. Again, a narrative based on the myth of a founding hero (or heroes)—and associated practices—are productive of power and social identity.

There are counter-narratives told privately among locals: best known is that of the Daoist priest at Huanglong who committed suicide under the pressure of secularization in the Maoist years of the 1960s. The manner and location of his self-burial on the bluff opposite the Huanglong temple activated a series of powerful Daoist cosmic messages. Some local people burn incense at his empty makeshift tomb and a few identify him with the Yellow Dragon himself. In the face of official discouragement (*we want to put those bad things of the cultural*

[2] This is not the place to discuss the well-known overlap between pilgrim and tourist. Turner and Turner 1978.

revolution behind us), this ritual, along with stories about his services to the community, enunciate a message of tacit resistance to state policy similar to those uncovered by Mueggler (2001) (Sutton 2005 ms.).

The tourists from urban China and abroad are almost never aware of any of these narratives and rituals. The only exception is the unavoidable image of the Yellow Dragon at the main (Rear) temple, about whom some are curious enough to ask. But there are other narratives peculiarly accessible to them at Huanglong, three in particular: 1) The patriotic narratives of the Yellow Dragon as a symbol of the Chinese nation 2) An environmentalist narrative fostered and publicized as a result of World Heritage elevation and 3) several sentimental narratives.

First, the materials made available to tourists and their guides reproduce local folklore that Yellow Dragon assisted the Chinese culture hero Yu the Great in harnessing the rivers of the region, that the undulating hilly ground is his backbone, the yellow outcrops his claws, and the colorful pools and running springs his shining scales, but play down the "superstitious" element. They identify the dragon, as "the symbol of the Chinese nation." Noting that Yu the Great was the ancestor of the Qiang minority as well as the Han, they reincorporate this border landscape in a history of ethnic harmony, with the dragon's Rear Temple suitably occupying the top of the slope, and the rebuilt Tibetan Middle Temple subsumed in a subordinate location a few hundred feet below. Without acknowledging the Rear Temple's religious nature, they recruit Daoism as a national symbol, suggesting that the beautiful surroundings reflect the essence of the Daoist philosophy: the unity of nature and man (Sutton and Kang, in press). This lends a patriotic meaning to the local landscape through which Han urban tourists wander, living their own narratives.

An implicit environmentalist message is the second narrative accessible to tourists. Since World Heritage status was achieved in 1992, stringent sanitary arrangements have been introduced to cope with the hundreds of thousands of tourists who come every year. This is a modern narrative of landscape, juxtaposed to the freewheeling pilgrimages that some remember from pre-Communist days. There are banks of toilets arranged behind bush screens along the 5-mile slope, water pipes and electric lines under the paths, and strictly enforced prohibitions on leaving the path, picking flowers, and on lighting

campfires and cigarettes, the last a serious privation for many. Then there are the picture boards identifying local fauna and flora arranged along the path for educational purposes. The underlying plot of this landscaped narrative is that China is becoming modern (Kang and Sutton, in press). Some criticize the management for cutting down trees for the new chairlift, and others relish the sense of a protected environment, both showing sensitivity to global movements of conservation. Photographing a bird next to the path, a man at Jiuzhaigou said playfully within our earshot: *Birds aren't afraid of people in America. Now in China birds aren't afraid of people either! We are making progress!* The many signs along the paths naming the various views make another narrative consistent with the respectful appreciation of nature, adding picturesqueness to its beauties with typically Chinese redundancy. The wider landscape of new hotels, improved roads and an airport near Chuanzhusi reinforce the general rationalizing and secularizing effect. These implicit narratives disenchant by challenging the older sacred narratives. They manifest Management Bureau authority hitching itself to global ideologies.

Third, and more directly comparable with the older narratives, is a new attempt to humanize the landscape and to "mythicize" human figures. Two new sentimental symbols have been set before tourists, rivaling the old Long March memorial which is little visited these days. One well-known symbol is a pattern of mountain peaks to the north of the travertine slope identified as the "sleeping beauty," a Tibetan girl lying on her side wearing a turban and "slightly raised breasts." It was a male visitor, Li Jie, who first noticed her, describing the sight breathlessly in an article in 1992 (Zeng 1995:48). Her narrative is that she saved the Multicolored Lake when the Queen Mother of the West (a Chinese deity) wanted it for the palace of heaven; instead she stole five jewels as a substitute from her father's staff. The Management Bureau favors this symbol, and its new tourist center figures a large bas-relief of the Tibetan beauty, now long-haired, awake, smiling, and standing. At the folk arts pageant held at Huanglong in July 2004 a special dance was devised to celebrate her. Her passive figure and pro-Chinese narrative, one might say, is a suitably unthreatening image of frontier ethnicity (cf. Schein 2000).

Another narrative attached to the site is that of a 1990s college graduate called Yu Yuan, who came to find consolation in Huanglong's natural beauty after her boyfriend broke up with her, but in despair committed suicide "so as to live in the beauty of Huanglong forever." Unmarried couples, claims the tourist literature, visit to declare their love for each other. An official plaque at a rest kiosk, near the reputed site of her self-sacrifice, became on of othe tourist way-stations.

Like the other narratives, these images weave reality and fiction into the local landscape, but they do so in an approved contemporary fashion. Assuming tourists are like other Chinese, they were spending a third of their time by 2003 watching nightly soap operas, many of them love-stories (*Beijing Daily* 21 March 2003). Playing on contemporary romantic ideals, both of these imagined young women are identified with—and enhance—the picturesque terrain. The sleeping beauty invites the tourist into personal and imaginative involvement with the landscape, personified as an exotic Tibetan; and the story of a Han Chinese love suicide is even more romantic and sentimental.

Both stories carefully avoid politics, moral pedagogy and "superstition." In common with the older ones these narratives appropriate a natural site through identification with a dead human who in life possessed special qualities, but both figures are female and passive, unlike the powerful and protective and partisan heroes of Tibetan, Han Chinese and Communist pilgrims. The happy Tibetan girl and the sad Yu Yuan retain only the disenchanted sacrality of the tourist destination—sentimental, broadly Chinese and humanized.

Why is Danei/Damei, the girl on the mountain, so much more popular than Yu Yuan? She is an available image—always there when the cloud and mist clears at Huanglong and one looks back on reaching the top. Being visible, to those with enough imagination, her story is open to elaboration. This is surely why representations have been so readily transferred to other media. Her story is still unfolding in several variations; one of these neatly captures the ethnic harmony of official ideology by explaining that she was the daughter of White Shell mountain and the adoptive daughter of Huanglong. And being aesthetically linked with the Tibetan woven products offered for sale, she is especially suited for commodification. By contrast the story of the woman who

committed suicide remains an abortive story, an undeveloped myth. Perhaps the written notice half way up the site has fixed the story too soon and given such an aura of fact and truth that it is hard to embroider, but a more important obstacle may be that no visual representation has been made. Only potentially picturesque, she cannot compete with Danei, whose distant and intriguing image encourages interpretation, and can be captured by a camera. Visuality seems central to the tourist, perhaps especially in China. If we turn from the imagined narrative of Huanglong to the lived tourist narratives of Huanglong and the surrounding region, we can find support for this proposition.

Visuality and Tourist Narratives

Tourism Chinese-style alters the landscape as it draws attention to it. There is verbal propaganda on huge banners, but one is struck by the emphasis on the image. Colored billboards (sometimes fifty meters across), posters and video displays promote the main natural attractions, underscoring the essentially visual appeal of their destination, sometimes at the expense of historical authenticity. They represent Huanglong as a wonder of nature, omitting pictures of temple buildings that might suggest a religious history but employing a pantheistic language "Sacred ground, land of fairies, Jasper pools of heaven in our human world." The experience of Jiuzhaigou is dominated by its buses plying up and down a Y-shaped valley from one scenic spot to the next, each bus bearing logos of pandas (never recorded at the site) and staffed with bus guides in Tibetan dress who are actually Han Chinese students. At both Huanglong and Jiuzhai large-screen video monitors face the entrances, replaying views of the snow-capped mountains, forested slopes and beautiful colored pools within. The stress on visuality, on visible surfaces at the expense of content, is also evident in different ways at nearby Songpan, rebuilt as the "old Tang Songzhou" with towering city walls refaced in stone and brick, fancy ornamental gatehouses, and standard façades for the main streets. The rebuilding has focused on externals, with no attempt to restore the old temples and bell towers that once stood behind the façade.

The visual advertisements have several purposes. Indirectly they testify to the energy and commitment of local officials, and more directly they attract tourists to new places, keeping them longer in the region—perhaps they will stay in one of the hotels and spend more money in souvenir shops. Local guidebooks set forth a new tourist geography focusing not on sacred mountains or temples but on Mounigou and five other lesser sights in Songpan. Billboards, video displays and guidebooks all link together the picturesque in a grid map joined by bus-worthy roads. The nodes on this map sketch out a connected narrative that is visual in nature. This visuality is what most sharply distinguishes the tourist landscape from the others.

Some authors deplore the superficiality of the tourist gaze, but visuality seems to be the essence of tourism (Davis and Marvin 2004:68-69, 262-63).[3] The reason may be simple: tourists are forever in a hurry. They are in almost every case making their first and last visit, ticking off this year's sites on a mental map, suffering the discomforts of travel on China's overburdened roads and airways for moments of pleasure that are enjoyed and remembered as visual images. (A jaded 31-year-old female tour guide: *They don't have much time off from work. They don't know how to distinguish among the tours, so choose the cheapest ones with the largest number of scenic spots [jingqu]. They get up early and go to bed late: they are always tired. They are looking for comfort rather than pristine natural environments.)* Given their haste, discomfort and shortage of time, the visual is what can be appropriated most readily at the various attractions. As to the content of the experience, it is limited in three ways, which I now explore in detail: they can assimilate only what the medium of consumption permits, what the tourism industry pushes, and what cultural attitudes acquired in contemporary urban China lead them to expect.

The technology of the camera and the accompanying culture of picture taking are responsible for the forms visuality takes. Using the camera (or video) is the principal tourist ritual. (The scene can easily be imagined*: Stand here, near the water, no over a bit, that's right, please do you mind not blocking us, thank you, got it, now take the camera, do one of me, yes, the button left of your finger, is the cave in the*

[3] These authors cite secondary studies by Albers and James, Tom Selwyn, Valerie Smith, John Urry and others which I will include in a fuller version.

picture? Let's see it, oh, that woman got her arm in the way, once more./Never mind, let's go on up, it's getting too crowded, there are more waterfalls ahead.) Putting the visitor front and center, this is the kind of ritual that produces a lasting relationship between site and visitor. Admittedly it is a rather thin relationship because few pictures are truly worth a thousand words. After the picture taker returns home, what was learned at the site is likely forgotten. A guidebook or tour pamphlet may jog the memory, but historical and geographical contexts will remain vague. Given the little knowledge at hand, the important associations are personal—of the subject rather than the object pictured. The camera, combining subject with view, is an instrument of appropriation, transferring symbolic ownership of a site or parts of it to the permanent possession of the tourist, in the form of fading snapshots and the ever vaguer memories they stir up.

What is distinctively Chinese about the picture taking? First, Chinese tourists seem to take more pictures. Westerners (perhaps because they mostly don't join package tours) are more likely to *do* things than take pictures: rafting and horse expeditions are favorites in Songpan. The Tibetan horse expeditions designed for foreigners and including overnight camping promise authenticity; so do Tibetan monastic festivals. All offer the kind of unmediated contact with local culture and nature that comfort-seeking Han Chinese tourists find unnecessary. Second, Han Chinese tourists are more likely to include family members in the shot.[4] Rather than capturing nature or history in the raw, they prefer to insert themselves in the landscape, as if to appropriate it. Third, they like to introduce ethnic representatives into the landscape, placing nature and culture in the same frame (cf. Oakes 1998; Schein, 2000). Characteristic of the Songpan region is a combination of the two kinds of landscape framing: the photo mock-up, an exotic painted background in which one pokes one's head, or the paid-for pose with a costumed ethnie (as at Jiuzhaigou) against the blue waters of a lake. Tourist family, ethnie and scenery in a single frame.

Picture taking and the accompanying patter constitute a sort of rudimentary lived narrative that is not properly realized until the pictures are

[4] Xiaofei Kang observes that city women seen in unlikely places wearing high-heeled shoes wear them in order to have decent pictures to show when they return.

strung together in an album or arranged in a framed display. The unifying elements are the memories of those who traveled and the preserved image of the tourist or tourist family. Glancing at the snapshots recapitulates what was first seen in temporal sequence as one tourist spot followed another, each site further subdivided into a series of views. Memory will dwell in accidents and surprises that set one expedition off from those of earlier years. (Imagined conversation: *That was the year we went to Four Maidens Mountains and got stuck in that six-hour traffic jam, wasn't it./And Didi was sick in the bus./ And the park police fined us for picking those orchids.)* Whether for video movies or snapshots, this narrative of appropriation will be rehearsed at every video viewing, summoned up even on glimpsing a single snapshot.

Notwithstanding the individualized nature of tourist pictures, the organization of the tourist industry guarantees that they are remarkably standardized (Davis and Marvin 2004:263-65, 268). Particular images are what bring the tourists in the first place. The same images are also what they take back—the pictures, as it were, reproducing themselves through the act of tourism. In the first place advertising lures visitors to the exotic beauties of sites like Huanglong in the form of wall-sized pictures in tourist agencies in Chengdu and other big cities of eastern China, or as documentary films shown on television. This branding by the industry in turn conditions the tourist arriving at the destination to look for the established views that set it apart from other sites, and to make sure to capture their beauty digitally or on film. Consequently the snapshots printed, savored and shown off to others are remarkably similar to those familiar from tourist films and billboards, with almost identical background settings. The limitations on creative picture taking are even greater in the Chinese national parks like Huanglong, in which an army of park guards and scavengers prevent people from straying from the ten miles of paths, up and down. There are not many possible shots to take, and the ever-moving, densely packed crowds (over 10,000 a day in the season) further limit angle and direction. On the web one can find many different personal pages of Huanglong pictures—the turquoise and blue-green pools, the rocky yellow outcrops, the conifered slopes and flanking mountains—but if one ignores personalized captions, the web pages are indistinguishable from each other, and differ from the

professional versions in guidebooks and tourist offices only in their amateur execution. Thus what are seen, imagined, bought, recaptured, and displayed at home are no more than branded images. The difference with the brochures and billboards, as I have noted, is that smiling family portraits are very often superimposed over these images.

The tourists look different from locals and other pilgrims in dress and complexion, and they behave differently, frequently stopping, getting out of breath in the thin air, buying oxygen in inflated pillows or at the path-side oxygen bar, taking sedan rides or the chairlift—which supplies spectacular visual stimuli without the need for exercise, and their cameras differentiate them further. Cameras and video cameras are marks of middle-class urban and cosmopolitan superiority. (One tourist might say to another or to the ethnographer*: Is that a Minolta you have there?/ No, mine's a Nikon D80. Just out this year. Shutter speed 4000th of a second*). Such consumer conversations don't take place between tourists and locals because locals don't usually have cameras. The camera images seem the same but are not. The smile of the tourist is different from the smile of the local ethnie. The tourist smile, if not strained by exhaustion, belongs to the satisfied customer; it is directed at the self or family or others of the same social group. In snapshot albums it accentuates the individuality of the photographer's family, magnified in adventurous and flattering contexts that imply high levels of consumption. The ethnic smile is directed at the other. As reproduced it represents the group to others, and reinscribes its minority status, rarely designating a particular individual or moment.

Despite the standardization, then, these holiday snaps are acts of social differentiation. The competition for space produces friction, setting tourists in unequal competition with pilgrims and other locals, and contradicts the state enjoined ethnic harmony. Ethnies may find themselves the subjects of the tourist gaze, especially if they are in minority dress. Picture taking is not always welcome, even when permission is asked, and can give rise to irritation on the crowded paths and spaces up the mountain slope. *(*Tourist seeing woman in Tibetan costume, overheard on the Huanglong up-path: *Quick let me snap this Tibetan (Xizangren).* Woman turns and responds*: I'm not from Tibet, I'm from Aba region.)* Being concerned with outward appearances, tourists don't make fine

distinctions, taking minority costume as an uncomplicated marker and objectifying its wearer. Here the Han Chinese unconsciously brings into play all the learned information about minority nationalities, whose charm and simplicity fill popular stories and films, whose indistinguishable smiles and colorful dresses adorn magazines and whose dances, representing the ethnic variety of the Chinese people, enliven the day-long lunar New Year TV productions (Gladney 1994, Oakes 1998, Schein 2000). The nature of this information will be apparent in another conversation, overheard on a park bus in Jiuzhaigou between a Tibetan primary school teacher and a visiting Han Chinese from Shenzhen. No doubt noticing the slightly suntanned complexion of the teacher, *Are you Tibetan? It must be wonderful to live in this beautiful countryside./ Actually I don't live in Jiuzhaigou. We think it must be wonderful to live in skyscrapers like you./ Look at those houses: they are so well built./ Yes, but Tibetans live in many poor places elsewhere.* The Shenzhen visitor, perhaps calling to mind the pastoral nomads pictured in magazines and on TV: *Do you move from one valley to another every year? /You are thinking of the people on the plateau. I live in Songpan*.

Such encounters might raise questions in tourist minds about the stereotypes of harmonious minorities, but given the fleeting nature of tourist visits and the pervasiveness of China's culture of "internal colonialism" (Schein 2000), the impression of exotic primitivity is not likely to be dislodged. The relative poverty and colorful dress and stylish traditional houses, with their bare wood-pillared ground floors and airy lofts, will intensify the sense of difference and superiority. The same can be said of commercial transactions, the second most important tourist ritual after picture taking. The haggling over sedan chair rides (*aiya, don't exaggerate, we pay half that much in Wenzhou!)* or bargaining for souvenirs (yak horns, Tibetan headdresses, fur jackets, hunting knives, embroidered or woven material, provocative paintings of minority women)—only intensifies the same consciousness. These objects are all essentially visual (souvenirs are not for use but for show) and their purchase resembles picture taking as an act of appropriation, except that it is inverted: while the pictures put oneself into the others' ethnic or ethnicized space, the souvenirs make it possible to put ethnic things in one's personal space at home.

This viewpoint is buttressed not only by the media but by self-regard, for this is how Han Chinese like to imagine themselves—as consumers of exotica and citizens of a visibly (but not politically) multiethnic China (cf. Schein 2000, Oakes 1998, 2000). Just as local Tibetans are branded for tourist consumption, often quite willingly, Han tourists are arguably transformed by contact with them. By simplifying the identity of Tibetans and fitting them into a vision of China as a capacious country incorporating diverse societies at different stages of development, the tourist experience reinforces the sense of being at the top of the wave, the vanguard of China's future. This is a narrative of ethnic progress. Tibetans eventually will catch up, but for the moment the Han tourists are more impressed by their picturesque backwardness, tending to overlook the rapid changes that tourism is bringing to local society. There is an element of transposed nostalgia. Feeling they have lost their own history in the urbanized east as a result of Maoist campaigns in the 1960s, they have the impression that the minority Tibetans in China still retain much of theirs in the form of monasteries, their own language and a distinctive dress. Moreover the landscapes of which they seem so much a part have escaped the grimy seaboard industrialization of the past 30 years. Thus, nostalgia and sentimentality mix with self-satisfaction as Han tourists are reminded of their own relative material successes, and their satisfaction is reinforced by a sense of ethnic condescension towards their younger-brother-and-sister national minorities. In this way, irrespective of social position at home, Han tourists are remade as persons of status: the radical simplification of *minority* identities is the obverse of the reinforcement of the *majority* 92% Han identity.

All this is done by narratives placed in landscapes imagined, lived, framed, and above all visualized. Ritual action, objects seen and purchased, all serve to link ethnic inhabitants with their environment, objectifying and exoticizing both. The eye appropriates, positioning the tourist enduringly as pan-Chinese, Han ethnic and as consumer.

Despite the visual power in these imagined and lived landscapes, the internal colonial message of media and ideology is not determining. In other work we have noted the subversion of official policy by local agency: Tibetan villagers-turned-merchants use their commercial profits from tourism to build

old-style houses packed with religious objects and symbolism that reconstitute Tibetan culture and values; Han Chinese with great resourcefulness revive their own religious practices, despite active official interference; and those who memorialize the priest as a martyr quietly challenge official policy. Given the fleeting nature of tourist exposure, the visual discourse I have emphasized leaves less room for agency on their part. Yet some do adopt an active critical stance and compare the merits of each site and its management. Despite the carefully prepared official signboards very few take any interest in the fauna and flora; and some, confounding the anti-superstition message of their socialist education, imitate the local pilgrims in offering incense at the temples—clumsily but with every indication of devotion.

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