

Tourism and China's ethnic rurality: A tale of two villages

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Abstract

Recent trends in China's domestic tourism development offer possibilities for the democratisation of the ways that places and people are represented and understood. This study offers a timely intervention for understanding the change in China's ideologically charged tourism representations as affected by the growth of domestic travel. The central topics are the creation and production of places of tourism in two ethnic minority rural villages. The analysis on the promotional outputs of both villages across various media defines tourism as a discourse of difference and indicates that tourism is utilised by the Chinese government as an ideological tool to locate and define minority ethnicity. The study aims to determine how China's ethnic places are produced and their effect on the social and institutional relations in a contemporary nation that is stratified upon rural and ethnic binaries of difference.

KEYWORDS: China, discourse, ethnic minority, making places, tourism

Introduction

Since the beginning of the socialist era, the Chinese communist state has been central in the recognition, definition and classification of ethnic groups and places in China. In the 1990s, the growth of domestic tourism allowed the utilisation of a social medium that shapes public understandings of ethnic minority groups and places. However, recent trends in domestic tourism suggest a growth in grassroots independent travel that offers possibilities for the democratisation of the way that places and people are represented and understood. This study offers a timely intervention for understanding the change in China's ideologically charged tourism representations as affected by the growth of domestic travel.

In 2013, the study sites were settled on two ethnic rural villages in southern China: Longji Titian¹ and Jiabang Titian (*Longji* and *Jiabang* hereinafter, Figure 1). Both villages' attraction to visitors was based on terrace farm scenery and ethnic minority com-

¹ Titian literally means terraced fields in Chinese.

munities. Longji has been ‘open’ to tourism since the early 1980s and is currently an area transformed by tourism. Daily busloads of visitors fill the area, and they consume not only landscapes but also local culture, food, and accommodation. Jiabang’s tourism was very much nascent. Transport links were poor, and visitor numbers were very low. Longji and Jiabang were chosen because they share the same thematic facets of interest to tourists and national tourist developers and rural, ethnic, and terraced landscape communities. The sites were chosen to reflect each other because of their relative positions on the relative sliding scale of development.

This study defines tourism as an analytical discourse that acts as a key mediator in creating, relaying, and producing idealised knowledge on ethnic minorities and rural places in China. Firstly, tourism’s role in making and representing places and people is outlined, thereby setting the foundation for analysis. Specifically, the historical development of two phenomena integral to understandings of Longji and Jiabang, namely, China’s contemporary rural-urban divides and recent institutional construction of minority ethnicity is conducted. An examination follows on how China’s domestic tourism can be regarded as a vehicle of state ideology that is mobilised as a mechanism for economic and social development. By situating a placed agent – tourism promotion – in the contextual field of minority ethnicity and landscape, the analysis focuses on individuals’ understanding of the process of place and socio-cultural construction. Foucault’s (1979) concept of disciplinary power is utilised to demonstrate how tourism is mobilised as a politicised vehicle for ideology. The intersection of how destinations are presented to visitors is examined by investigating the promotional outputs of Longji and Jiabang across various media, such as posters and websites.

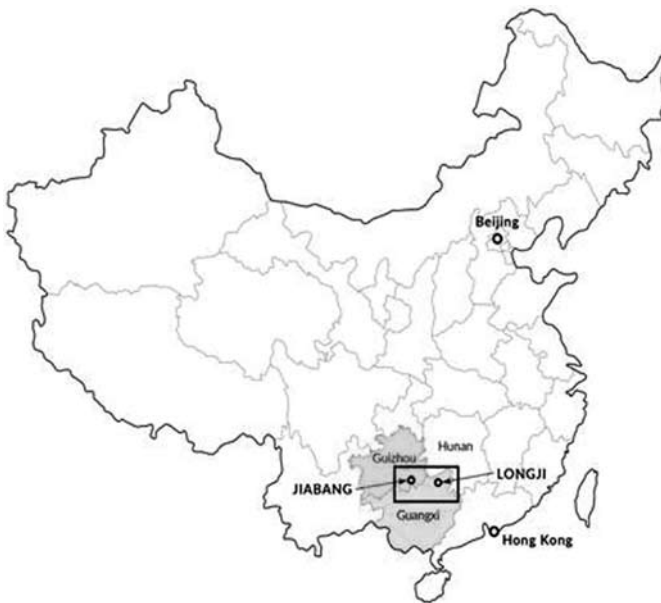


Figure 1: Sketch map of the location of Longji and Jiabang

Discourse, power, and tourism

Discourses are systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak (Foucault 1980). Discourses constrain individual agency by shaping social relations, identities and meanings and the overall contours of the taken-for-granted world, which both naturalise and universalise particular subject formations and worldviews (Thorpe 2012). Discourses emerge from systems of knowledge and mobilise to legitimise relationships of power, dependence, understanding, cooperation and domination. The knowledge that shapes explicit understandings of the world is spatially and temporally contingent and is institutionalised through cultures along with customs, organisations and individuals that create webs of influence that define power relationships (Foucault 1980). All knowledge is derived from human intervention and is simultaneously restricted by underlying beliefs and assumptions from humankind imposing order upon its own experiences to make the world comprehensible.

Foucault argues that power is enacted by the dissemination of certain kinds of knowledge that formulate ways of seeing the world: 'the exercise of power itself creates a condition for the emergence of new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information' (Foucault 1980: 51). The creation of discourses enacts and cements power because power is implicit in and arises from all kinds of relationships (Foucault 1990). Through this token, tourism may be considered one such instrument that is imbued with certain ideologies, images and messages in such a way that it makes the world within and without the context of its direct material intervention. Tourism 'commonly makes, de-makes or remakes those very populations, destinations and heritages' at the heart of its focus; thus, tourism can be considered "worldmaking" (Hollinshead et al. 2009: 428). Tourism representations are skewed snapshots of reality that passively reflect prevailing cultural values and distributions of power in society by drawing upon current stereotypes and images (Overton & Murray 2016; Pan et al. 2017); they also play a prominent role in shaping values, behaviours, and identities by contributing to the process of socialisation (Morgan & Pritchard 1998).

Certain versions of the world are represented by tourism. Therefore, they are represented at the expense of others. For example, certain voices are heard more than others, certain histories are presented more widely than others, and certain narratives are used to recreate histories of people and places at the expense of others. The selection of discourse types is largely collaborative with the institutionalised worldviews, value systems and ideologies created within the centres of power. Consequently, tourism processes have broad cultural meanings that extend far beyond the actual consumption of tourist products and places (Morgan & Pritchard 1998). Tourism provides a means by which governments can project ideological messages, shape national identities, and legitimise their positions (Ashworth 1994; Davies 1987). The corresponding effects are most attuned in tourism target areas where disparities in wealth and power exist between tourists and toured communities (Bruner 2005; Caton & Santos 2007; Hollinshead 2009). When dominant groups steer developmental policy and promotional activities to target less powerful groups, tourism representations articulate relations between the centre and the periphery (Tresidder 1999) and the socio-cultural domination of certain groups by others (Dann 1996). Such cases often occur in areas of ethnic differences where tourism provides a medium that enables governments to produce and disseminate discourses in which minority groups are constructed (Lidchi 1997).

China’s rural-urban divides and institutional construction of ethnicity

A rural-urban continuum had been traditionally present in China; specifically, place-based rural and urban distinctions were less significant than in the post-industrial Western nations where cities emerged as the centres of power and advancement (Park 2008). The influence of Western powers caused the first rupture to China’s traditional rural socio-cultural status quo. A catalogue of military defeats to foreign powers was culminated by a humiliating loss to Japan in 1895. As a strategy to counter China’s fallen status, intellectuals and elites began to search for radical alternatives from models of industrialisation and urbanisation elsewhere. Traditional ways of thinking were questioned in favour of ideas of foreign derivation, scientific thought, human equality, and democracy. The rural came to signify a spatial representation of the nation’s stagnation. Modernity was perceived to be found in the cities that were centres of dynamism and forward thinking and juxtaposed to tradition and became a byword for the inertia that had held China back. These changes created a re-conceptualisation of social order, one of the consequences of which was a shift in attitudes towards the places and people of traditional Chinese society, that is, the countryside (Wang et al. 2017).

In the years immediately after the 1949 birth of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party picked through the wreckage of the previous century of upheaval. Its immediate task at hand was to set China on the road to modernisation, that is, socialist modernity. After 1976, China’s reform was tinged by a renewed thirst for modernisation, and the leadership repeated the pattern from a century before of looking overseas at advanced capitalist countries. China again sought to catch up with these nations by adopting their ‘scientific technology’ (Xu 2013: 7). Consequently, urbanites began to associate the rural with backwardness (Liu 1996). China’s socio-political constructions of place-based individual and group identities stem from the inception of rural-urban stratification and the subsequent perception that rural and urban folks are too different and that they embody different values and lifestyles that are mutually incompatible. This belief clearly delineated the rural-urban gap throughout a century of upheaval and allowed modern urban Chinese to perceive the countryside as a repository of traditional values; this strategy allows them to embrace their urban modernity with the knowledge that the countryside acts as a guardian of their traditional *Chineseness* (Sayers 2006).

Table 1: Outline of China’s ethnic composition (2010)

Ethnic Group	Population (number)	Population (%)
Han (Majority Ethnicity)	1,220,844,520	91.60
All Ethnic Minorities	111,966,349	8.40
Zhuang	16,926,349	1.27
Miao	9,426,007	0.71
Yao	2,796,003	0.21

Note: Among the 55 minority ethnicities, attention is focused on the Zhuang, Miao, and Yao ethnic groups who reside in the studied field sites (Source: Sixth National Population Census of China (2010)).

In China, minority ethnicity has become synonymous with rurality. The state characterises minority areas as being 'rich with natural resources. However, compared with other regions, particularly with developed regions, the level of economic and social development in these regions is relatively backward'.² The 2010 census suggests that the 55 minority groups combined make up a mere 8.4% of the population, which was dominated numerically, culturally and institutionally by the majority Han group (Table 1). Ethnic minorities are in many ways modern China's antithesis, associated with the backward side of the rural-urban divide. The understanding of the national ethnicities in China should be centred on examining the *Project of Ethnic Identification*, which had streamlined more than 400 groups down to the current 56 by 1983. This exercise was to instigate a programme of universal cultural management that brings order to the country. Thus, from its very inception, this project demonstrated the will and the effectiveness of the Chinese central state to exert discursive power over its people. Through such exercises, the government ideologically reconfigured China's ethnic landscape to create an understanding of ethnicity aligned to the ultimate goal of retaining a cohesive, multi-ethnic nation for socialist modernity (Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Building the People's Republic 1949–1956: 'Long live the great unity of all the peoples of the whole nation', January, 1957 (Source: <http://chineseposters.net/gallery/e15-355.php>).*

² Chinese Government White Paper, Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20050301/index.htm>.

The propaganda poster above was published in 1957 soon after the bulk of the *Project of Ethnic Identification* had been completed. The focus of ethnic taxonomies on overt features and material symbolism is reflected in the ways that ethnicity is understood in contemporary China. Specifically, attention focuses more on local customs and traditions than on culturally insightful aspects of worldview, belief and meaning that may come from studies of socialisation processes, values, symbol systems, family, and individual values (Diamond 1995). Minority ethnicity has become a generic category of difference in relation to the dominant Han group, and ethnic minorities are often marked by overt cultural markers such as traditional dress and unusual customs. The minorities are passive receptacles of state-created knowledge, thereby providing the justification and the means for dominance. In the current study, attention is directed to the creation and mobilisation of a coherent and officially recognised discourse of ethnicity in China. Its recognition as an *objective* enterprise and the dissemination of the “truths” created within its remit have allowed for the propagation through various media. Extensive understandings and contexts of the society in which it is situated are central factors for analysing how tourism represents communities and environments. The following analysis demonstrates how tourism promotions utilise and reciprocate constructions of minority ethnicity, rural places and people.

Tourism promotion and the Chinese landscape

Direct interaction with promotional outputs created by destination marketers is a crucial part of the tourist process of planning and preparation that enables the imaging of the destination; ‘[i]t is future-oriented travel in the present’ (Jack & Phipps 2005: 82). Representations and thus the defined lure of Longji and Jiabang are centred on their terraced field landscapes. The photograph in Figure 3 shows that the rhythms of nature are keys to the representational strategies in the tourism promotion of both villages. The photograph depicts a typical scene captured during a crisp, spring sunrise. As the emerging light breaks over the mountains, it glistens across the pools of water that sits in the paddy fields, thereby creating clouds of fog that spill down from the mountains to sit in the valleys. The preponderance of imagery during springtime alludes that this season is the best time to visit. Notably, the image from this part of the year accounts for nearly 90% of the images from Jiabang with the examined photographs mainly taken by tourists. In Longji, the images are closely related to purposes for tourism promotion and are from all seasons but are skewed numerically towards the springtime.

Promotional materials position the terraced fields and surrounding landscapes as natural or as part of nature. The idea of glorifying nature as detached from and untouched by humans is a concept that will be neither understood nor appreciated in China. The reason is that the tradition in this country sees that natural places are valued, appreciated, aesthetically pleasing and considered as morally enhanced by the cultural refinement that emerges from human interaction. Zhang (2013) highlights a cultural lineage that extends back to Confucius, from whom the Chinese literati began the long tradition of seeking spiritual values and wisdom in nature by integrating the human and the natural with no clear distinction of the self and the natural environment (Feng 2008). Thus, natural elements



Figure 3: Landscape of Jiabang on the China National Geography website (Source: <http://www.dili360.com/article/p53e07d15ec1f682.htm>)

are traditionally the centre of moral and aesthetic ideas in China, thereby making idealised landscape places where humankind and nature are in harmony.

This culturally contingent holistic worldview of the man-nature relationship permeates into how the terraced landscapes and thus the ethnic minority places of *Longji* and *Jiabang* are presented. Representations posit a conjoining of humankind and nature to formulate a view of terraced pastoral landscapes as an organic part of a holistic relationship and therefore as a naturalised landscape. The landscapes do not follow a neat nature/culture binary, and they are both neither because the dualistic distinction is redundant. Through the same token, the people set in the landscape become part of a culture that merges towards a state that is regarded as being natural. The landscape is adorned by and adorns nature in a reciprocal relationship; the terrace fields are the manifestation of the creativity and imagination that emerge when man and nature come together; it is the model of man and nature harmoniously existing together.³ These sentiments are repeated throughout written materials of both sites and present the agricultural landscapes as an extension of the natural world that is forged from a conjoining of humans and the natural landscapes (Figure 4).

Detachment, power, and reconciling naturalised people

In the promotional materials analysed, landscapes are not presented in an intimate way; in particular, the viewer is not in the fields but is on a high position and is thus considered a *detached* observer. The photograph in Figure 5 conveys a message of timelessness

³ 'Walk into Jiabang Terraces - enter a fairytale land of fantasy', [<http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/680374.html>].



Figure 4: Farming in harmony with nature (Source: Longji tourism information brochure)

and a rural idyll. The image shows people moving through and living amongst nature. This scenario is outlined through a composition that illustrates the local people working and living within the landscape in their daily lives. The people are returning home to their village, which merges into, adorns and becomes part of the natural scene. Potential tourists looking at these images can immediately understand that this place invites them to gaze upon a dominion that is laid out before them in a series of vistas, and their role is to watch in a detached, passive function whilst others toil. Many images in the Longji dataset utilise three key visual signifiers of place that become tied together in images. The example below includes the built and agricultural environments and ethnic minority people moving through them.

Notably, promotional materials symbolise nature as permeating every aspect of the places portrayed. Longji and Jiabang are frequently referenced in textual accompaniments as being characterised as *yuanshengtai*, which is an ambiguous term that emphasises an indigenously developed knowledge of the ecology that is natural, spiritual, pristine, and green and that incorporates systems of beliefs, values, and spirituality (Wang 2008).⁴ The crux of

⁴ Given the multiplicity of translations of *yuanshengtai* and the multiplicity of concepts tied into it, the phrase is employed rather than any direct translation.



Figure 5: Ethnicised and naturalised landscape – Longji: ‘Another Bumper Year’ (Source: ‘LongjiZhiguang’ (The Light of Longji) from the promotional booklet by photographer Ma Hongzhan)

the emergence of *yuanshengtai* emanates from contemporary anxieties over the perceived ebbing of traditional influences on modern life, rapid social change, and environmental degradation caused by unbridled development. When centred on places such as remote, ethnic minority rural areas, the impulses of *yuanshengtai* have become formulated as an anti-modern reaction that is expressed in the desire to preserve cultures that are threatened by modernity. Therefore, the ethos of *yuanshengtai* ‘tries to convey a sense of perceived authenticity in traditional and local cultural traits unaffected by modern cultures’ (Chen 2008: 159). The lure of places of *yuanshengtai* is an opportunity to savour and delight in the place of visitation whilst also affording an opportunity to lament and reflect on detrimental changes brought about by developmental progress in the *modern* world.

In tourism promotional materials, *yuanshengtai* is a phenomenon that is projected from the *outside* onto the places at its focus. At its heart is the condition of contemporary anxiety about the loss of local particularities in an age of fast-paced national modernisation. The use of *yuanshengtai* as a term has become ambivalent. On the one hand, anxiety has been coupled with age-worn stereotypes that frame ethnic minorities as traditional, remote,

untouched and un-civilisable; in particular, they are placed as repositories and bastions of national tradition, homeland and cultural lineage. On the other, *yuanshengtai* is a reaction to the very forces of modernity that have allowed an increased awareness of the places it targets and that have allowed those same places to become materially within reach through increased opportunities to travel. Therefore, encapsulated within *yuanshengtai* is an ambivalence that allows it to be used as a descriptor of Longji and Jiabang as places untouched by modernity whilst allowing them to be places targeted by that quintessential outgrowth of modernity itself: tourism.

Yuanshengtai is used differentially to describe Longji and Jiabang. *Yuanshengtai* expresses different meanings when applied to each site because of the massive developmental differences that exist between the two places due to the ways they are presented in tourism materials. In Longji, *yuanshengtai* is employed in a symbolic way designed to reflect the flavour of the ethnic culture because of the heavily developed tourist economy and infrastructure of this village. Conversely, in Jiabang, *yuanshengtai* is used as an encompassing descriptor of the place in general by reflecting its perceived backwardness and detachment from modernity, which indicates that it is ‘still a good place that has not been opened to tourism.’⁵

Although the general applications of *yuanshengtai* to both villages considerably differ, certain signs, narratives and objects that are associated with it in both places are the same. Universally, *yuanshengtai* reflects a romanticised idea of the *ecological native* or those communities envisaged to be in harmony with nature to the extent that they become and represent it. Promotional imagery conveys the idealised standard that indigenous peoples have been guardians of sacred landscapes tied into intricate relationships with the rhythms of nature by protecting the nation’s biological and cultural heritage ‘where nature meets culture in fantasies of indigenous stewardship’ (Litzinger 2004: 494). Such, for example, is a description in one of the blogs:

The rice terraces are created from the imagination and creativity of people facing the natural environment and are the best example of the harmony between humans and nature. Early people might not mean to change the land for something totally different and aggressive. The paddy field was built on the harmony of humans and nature in which nature provided the platform and was transformed by human generation after generation (Go Travel Web).⁶

As described above, the imagery and narratives draw the terraced landscape and the built environments towards an association as being natural, and the employment of *yuanshengtai* performs the same action on the local people. The communities of Longji and Jiabang are romanticised as representing that ever-tenuous link back to nature that has been cut down by development. Consequently, they are envisaged and represented as not only living in and understanding nature but also complimenting and ultimately becoming part of it.

⁵ Go Travel Web – Jiabang Terraces Blog, <http://www.ccyou.cn/bbs/thread-127994-1-1.html>.

⁶ Walk into Jiabang Terraces – enter a fairytale land of fantasy, <http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/680374.html>.

Typology of ethnic rurality

Whilst Longji and Jiabang are distinct, particularly in terms of their geographic, spatial and developmental characteristics, the imagery of tourism analysed in this study draws them into similar strategies of cultural representation that focuses on romanticised ideas of people and landscapes. Both places have been put on display and rendered into textual and visual descriptors and have become imbued with new meanings that share notable similarities and differences.

The terraced landscapes and the ethnic minority peoples that are situated within them have become the focus of representations used for promoting them as places of tourism. Accordingly, the meanings and uses of places have been transformed, that is, the contours and folds of the land are realigned to new purposes through idealised projections. The agricultural land has been transformed from its material use as something that is worked, ploughed and toiled, that is, something tangible upon which the local communities forged an existence, to something to be contemplated and admired, something that marks the taste of the individual who visits it and gazes upon it. The land is thus utilised in a different way, particularly from an economic landscape of production to one of aesthetic consumption. In the meantime, the local people have been reconfigured to represent idealised narratives of ethnicity aligned to traditional pastoral lifestyles, connectedness to nature and to a broad national cultural lineage.

Whilst similarities provide an overwhelming typology of imagery, nuanced differences also exist in the discursive strategies of place that reflect the extent of official mechanisms of place promotion in each site. Imagery from both places captures the ethnicity of *yuanshengtai* but does so differently. Official imagery from Longji encapsulates the image of the harmonious relationship between an indigenous population and the land. Local people and culture represent and provide a lineage to the core values of Chinese morality and civilisation, including community, harmony, and tradition. As a result, a repository is provided for modern, urban Chinese anxieties on the pace of change and the loss of authentic Chineseness. In the meantime, grassroots imagery from Jiabang is an attempt to capture the authentic feel of a lamentably disappearing rural life. However, the stressing of anxiety towards the changes heralded by unbridled development and the prevalence of imagery that depicts an un-sanitised version of rural life that is contrary to official tourism materials hints at the ways in which imagery and typologies of representation can be upset by the agency of individuals, netizens, and grassroots movements. Thus, these findings begin to unsettle the structured idea of the flow of power in tourism and illuminate the opportunities that people have to define, negotiate, and exert their own agency within the contexts of tourism in China. Furthermore, they outline a critical relationship between the level of official tourism development and subsequent government intervention and the intensity with which the imagery of place correlates to state taxonomies of ethnicity and place.

Although important nuanced differences exist, the general coherence of content, particularly in terms of ethnic and rural signifiers, must not be under-emphasised. A clear correlation exists between the imagery of what can be regarded as official outputs, that is, those relating to professionally produced and tourism management-produced imagery of place, and the use of images that follow the archetype of state imagery and discourses of ethnicity. Such imagery is overwhelmingly circulated in official promotional materials of Longji and professionally and state-produced images of Jiabang. These materials lean particularly on the ways in which locals are marked by ethnic clothing and are described

in terms of their intimate relationships with the rhythms of nature. Both cases are framed by the visual imperatives of distance, that is, socio-culturally between visitors and local people and spatially between the urban and rural; as a result, the perceived and material differences between the country and the city are encapsulated (Figure 6). These social and material distances encapsulate understandings between the Han urban centre and the peripheral minority ethnicities. Despite the spaces for expressions counter to state narratives in China, a comprehensive cultural understanding of rurality and ethnicity exists and is mediated by the wide reach of state ideology and narratives.

男不娶文盲妻，女不嫁文盲夫

这个老哥好像是要去送礼，寨子里的一家人新盖的房子。



Figure 6: Streets apart: representing rural–urban distance. The caption reads: ‘Men do not marry illiterate women, women do not marry illiterate men’ (a slogan displayed on buildings in the village to encourage school attendance). The old man is sending a gift, that is, a new house recently built in the village (Source: <http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/1285467.html>)

In both cases, a key aspect is the silence of voices emanating from within the communities. The imagery of Jiabang is exclusively created from the outside, that is, mainly by tourists. In contrast, the state-planned credentials in Longji are reflected in the preponderance of official narratives. Whilst local agency is engaged in Longji, the imagery and narratives that reflect central discourses are clearly reflected and adopted. Thus, tourism promotional materials occupy a place where the agency of locals can represent them and remove their

place. Local people and landscapes become objects and are attributed a passive voice, whereas agency falls to promotional companies, the media, the government, and visiting tourists. Thus, the question surrounding whose culture, ethnicity, and place are being represented arises.

The rural/urban difference is a central facet of the promotional materials of Longji and Jiabang. The image taken from Jiabang in Figure 6 emphasises the undeveloped nature of the village materially and in terms of levels of civilisation. The caption alludes to the poor levels of education, whereas the image refers to the disorder and poor standards of sanitation and facilities within the village. Much of the imagery and discursive representations of Jiabang are on travel blogs, and they reflect the nature of the village as a nascent tourism area with low levels of official interaction and planning. Consequently, a large proportion of the images reflect the opportunities that tourists find on the ground, and no examples in the Jiabang dataset of the staged-candid type images are common in the Longji dataset. As a result, the appearance of the imagery of Jiabang is more authentic or at least less mediated and staged than that of Longji. The dataset is less selective than the Longji dataset as an idealised and pure ethnic paradise where locals live traditional lifestyles in harmony with nature. Specifically, the imagery of Jiabang captures the urban tourist's lament of modernity and utopian fantasies of a pure, rural existence.

Whilst aiming to highlight differences, bloggers are also conscious of and display sadness about the imminence of change. This task is however offset by the ambivalence of the contrary impulse to attain cultural capital through the desire to broadcast that "I have been here", thereby hastening change:

This scenic spot is currently completely free of development. Its road is not good. Thus, group tours are uncommon. The only people going in the spot are photography enthusiasts.⁷

The present of the tarred road indicates that the local government is already helping tourism. In the long run, visit in the terraces will require a fee. Whether this situation is good is unclear. However, the reputation of Jiabang is gradually improving. After I post this message, the popularity of this place will certainly increase.⁸

Many of the comments allude to the imagined isolation of Jiabang, that is, a narrative that posits that change will only happen when development comes to the village. This narrative relays a simplified version of the local situation that imagines a fixed community beyond modern social problems and phenomena, such as rural-urban migration. The meta-narrative of the pure and the untouched extends to the people who are regarded as uncorrupted. Several accounts describe the people as *chunpu*, which refers to someone as being honest, simple and unsophisticated and not necessarily in a derogatory sense but as someone uncorrupted and unworldly. This term is often applied to rural folks regarded as uncorrupted by the modern, urban world.

⁷ 2013 National Holiday long trip – Guilin, Qiandongnan- Jiabang Terraces; a mind-blowing experience', <http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/910060.html>.

⁸ Wonderful! Guizhou's mysterious Jiabang Terraces – the arduous journey of exploring this wonderland', <http://club.autohome.com.cn/bbs/thread-c-396-6781285-1.html>.

Conclusion: power and normalisation of people and places

This study argues that tourism promotional materials provide a medium or a stimulus to seduce collective ways of thinking, knowing and imagining the places at their focus. Following Foucault's (1979) theoretical outline of disciplinary power, the study focuses on the intersection between the ways in which destinations are presented to visitors. The tourism promotional materials of Longji and Jiabang are utilised as a means to interrogate the key juncture at which tourists are enticed to become visitors and at which local people and places are created and structured from without using representational strategies. Theoretically, analysis of tourism materials has been structured by understandings of the power relations inert in the gaze (Urry 2002, 2006; Urry & Larsen 2011), in which the imagery and discourses of tourism promotional materials *work* on tourists and local communities. Tourism's imagery of enticement is complicit in creating and reciprocating idealised narratives and expectations of the people and places at its focus. Accordingly, a normalised image of what tourists will expect to see when they travel to the places represented is created. The cementing of such norms is driven by the promise of economic reward in the communities at the focus of the gaze who understand the expectations of tourists and adopt aspects of the normalised image to present to visitors.

The latter point is pertinent when considering differences between the formalised imagery of Longji, which carries the hallmarks of state imagery of ethnicity and touristic rurality, and the gritty depictions of rural difference as focused on the Jiabang dataset. Whilst the nascent nature of Jiabang's tourism offers the opportunity for tourists to create their own narratives and depictions of place, the extent to which this holds remains to be regarded as increased government intervention in planning and promotion that steers the image towards state imagery. If development patterns follow those from elsewhere, then the development will be conjoined by the complicity of locals who adopt favoured stylistic ethnicity as a means to harness tourism profits for themselves.

In China's market economy, tourism is an institutionally tied and managed sector and is guided by heavy state interaction and policy at all stages, from representational strategies to place planning (Li et al. 2010; Li & Hu 2008; 2011). This setting ensures that the state plays a central role not only in the designation and marking of spatial and ethnic categories but also in the representational strategies for highlighting particular aspects of culture, history and society; therefore, the state is central in the 'consumptive representation of some people and the consumptive containment of other' (Hollinshead 1998: 59). Mechanisms of designation, assignment, classification and management of place, identity and ethnicity are highly institutionalised in China, and they draw tourism representations into the politico-ideological realm because of its utilisation by some to define others.

The creation of the tourists' rural-ethnic imagination of place through promotional materials is the first key step in mediating touristic expectations. When visiting, tourists reify their imaginaries and consume; they also deny the contradictions between their expectations and local social reality to compartmentalise their experiences such that they can maintain their expectations unchallenged or deny the discrepancies and congruence between tourist expectation and experience (Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011: 2). As people experience the symbolic and material conditions brought about by imaginaries, they develop the associated

'understandings, emotions and desires' (Strauss 2006: 323). Thus, the creation of certain kinds of imaginaries is vital to tourism promoters because it allows them to mediate *how* tourists see, consume and ultimately understand their destinations.

This study has demonstrated how tourism promotional materials are utilised as a vehicle that projects idealised imagery of places, cultures, and societies. Such utilisation transforms tourism into a medium for the communication of discourses that occupy the socio-cultural grounds of the conceptual and real worlds of society. Tourism materials of Longji and Jiabang reflect imagery produced from outside the community. Thus, they follow codes of discourse related to spatial and ethnic differences, which, in both cases, reflect the power relations between ethnic and spatial groups and dominant ethnic and developmental narratives in Chinese society. The utilisation of tourism as a vehicle that spreads ideology and state discourses through the normalised imagery of ethnic minority and rural representations demonstrates the blurring of boundaries between the different cultural forces of ethnic production, which involve the state, policymakers and the laity. The imagery of ethnicity largely emanates from discourses created by the state. In particular, the channels through which cultural production emerges have expanded in contemporary society, whereas culture and ethnicity have been subject to marketisation in modern society. State taxonomies of place and ethnicity are integral to the ways in which Longji and Jiabang are presented. The reason is that they demonstrate how the representational mechanisms of tourism and that its promulgation of seemingly objective truths is implicit in the exercising of power and reification of state narratives of ethnicity, place and culture in peripheral areas. Notably, visitation rather than occupation can provide a mechanism for control of the periphery by the centre (Ateljevic & Doorne 2002).

In the context of the Chinese state's targeting of ethnic minority areas for development, tourism can be used as a mechanism of internal colonisation. The repeated ethnicisation of the landscapes of Longji and Jiabang reinforces and reproduces the distance between the local and tourist communities. Local people in Longji and Jiabang belong in their rural areas where lineages of ancestry, culture, tradition and knowledge tie them to *their* place. In the wide socio-cultural and economic integration in China, these people are regarded as very much *out of place* when they move beyond the places and landscapes in which they are portrayed as belonging to (Kwang & Li 2018; Massey & Jess 1995). Thus, tourism is a medium of cultural coding that hardens the social boundaries associated with rural migration to urban areas.

Understanding the ways in which *other* people and places are represented in societies provides an insight into the ways in which 'normal' society sees itself (Said 2003). State/Han representations of the ethnic minority terraced landscape areas of Jiabang and Longji elicit an ethnicisation of the landscape and a naturalisation of culture. Local places and populations are projected as being fixed in an idealised and undefined past. Whilst tourism promotional materials locate and fix ethnic minority populations, the mobile, modern, consumer targets of the imagery are invited to mobilise, spend and step back into a shared past. The imagery examines projects and cements spatial and social differences that restate a separation of toured and tourist groups along the lines of ethnicity, spatiality and socio-economic status. This situation results in what Shih (2002) calls 'reflexive orientalism' of the host communities who adopt corresponding representations that comply with the fantasies of tourists. China's recent growth of representations of ethnic minority groups

in tourism discourses opens a window on spatial and ethnic relations and representations. This phenomenon also results in the structuring of authority between the dominant Han and minority groups on the one hand and rural and urban spatial power and dominance on the other. The tourism portrayal of China's rural and ethnic places as exotic, poor, traditional and stagnant has become a popular metaphor for the social, cultural, political and economic separation and domination of peripheral ethnic and spatial groups.

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Povzetek

Trenutni trendi razvoja kitajskega domačega turizma ponujajo možnosti za demokratizacijo načina predstavljanja in razumevanja krajev in ljudi. Pričujoča študija ponuja pravočasno posredovanje za razumevanje sprememb v ideološko obremenjenih turističnih predstavitev na Kitajskem, kot jih je prizadela rast domačih potovanj. Osrednje teme so ustvarjanje in izdelava krajev turizma v dveh podeželskih vasicah etničnih manjšin. Analiza o promocijskih izidih obeh vasi v različnih medijih opredeljuje turizem kot diskurz razlik in kaže, da kitajska vlada uporablja turizem kot ideološko orodje za lociranje in opredelitev manjšinske etnične pripadnosti. Namen študije je ugotoviti, kako se proizvajajo etnična mesta Kitajske in njihov učinek na socialne in institucionalne odnose v sodobnem narodu, ki je stratificiran na podeželske in etnične binarne spremembe.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Kitajska, diskurz, etnična manjšina, mesta, turizem

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