Paradise under Construction: Minorities, Myths and Modernity in Northwest Yunnan

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Abstract: This chapter examines the impact of tourism-led economic development on Tibetan cultural identity. Since the 1990s the local state in Diqing has been actively involved in representing Tibetan culture to the outside world for the purposes of tourism promotion, including a successful bid to officially change the name of Zhongdian County to Shangri-la—the fabled Himalayan paradise. While ethnic tourism has resulted in the superficial "packaging" of Tibetan culture into forms that are politically palatable and commercially saleable, this chapter shows how the Shangri-la project has also created space for more meaningful forms of cultural expression beyond the control of the state.

Until recently, Zhongdian County was a little known corner of Yunnan province—a remote outpost on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. One of only three counties that make up the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Zhongdian created a sensation in 2001 when it formally changed its name to "Shangri-la" (*Xianggelila*)—the mythical paradise of the Himalayas, immortalized by the James Hilton novel and Frank Capra film *The Lost Horizon*. Attracting tourists by the millions, in the space of a few years the "Shangri-la Project" has dramatically transformed Diqing's economy and society. For the local authorities that spearheaded the campaign, the Shangri-la project has been a runaway success. Since the name change regional GDP has soared and local incomes have risen. Higher levels of government have expressed their support for the Shangri-la Project by providing large grants to support infrastructure development—much more so than in neighbouring Tibetan regions, for example. Diqing is now serviced by several daily flights to the provincial capital Kunming and by a two-lane highway to the nearby city of Lijiang which is soon to open an international airport. Zhongdian was once cut-off to the world, but Shangri-la is now within easy reach. This chapter explains the driving forces behind the Shangri-la Project and its significance for ethnic politics in twenty-first century Tibet.

In Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Tibetans have been the dominant ethnic group for several centuries. While ethnic Tibetans today make up approximately one third of the Prefecture's population, they are the largest ethnic group. Adapted to the upland environment, Tibetan economic and cultural practices have influenced other ethnic groups that have migrated to the region in more recent times. Thousands of Chinese Muslims, known as Hui, moved to the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many of them were seeking refuge from the

Qing's brutal suppression of Muslim rebellions in the empire's northwest. The Hui, many of who were artisans and miners, learned new economic practices from Diqing's Tibetans such as agriculture and animal husbandry. Many also adopted Tibetan dress and language, eventually becoming known to Chinese anthropologists as Zang Hui or Tibetan Muslims (Hillman 2004).

The majority of Diqing's 374,500 residents are farmers. Most rural Tibetans are transhumant agropastoralists, practising a combination of sedentary agriculture and herding, moving cattle from the villages to higher elevation pastures during the summer months. The rural economy in Diqing is similar to that in many parts of the Tibetan plateau, but the region's southern latitude and slightly lower average elevation provide for a milder climate and a higher degree of biodiversity than many other Tibetan areas. Whereas only barley and potatoes can be grown at higher elevations, Diqing's Tibetans have been successful in supplementing their barley and potato crops with corn, buckwheat, oats and root vegetables. Diqing is also rich in forest resources—65 per cent of the prefecture's 23,870 square kilometers is covered in forest.

Prior to the 1980s, most of Diqing's rural communities remained largely unexposed to the cash economy. Trade operated largely on the basis of a barter system. Upper elevation herders would trade their dairy products for the grains, nuts and fruits produced by lower elevation farmers. The cash economy arrived in Diqing with the advent of China's market reforms from the late 1970s. Market reforms and decentralization triggered rapid rural industrialization in the coastal provinces, which generated increasing demand for natural resources. Diqing's forests became a valuable commodity that local officials were able to exploit. Unable to extract much tax from a subsistence farming population, local authorities leapt at the unprecedented opportunity to fill local coffers with revenue from logging. Timber mills were established across the prefecture and logging came to dominate the local economy in Zhongdian. Nearly all of the wealthiest and most powerful local entrepreneurs and government officials were connected to the logging business. Control over logging revenues was a major source of political contestation within local government.

By the mid-1990s, timber industry revenues had peaked at just over 80 per cent of the prefecture's GDP. From the mid-1990s, however, timber revenues began to decline as a result of reduced timber prices due to trade liberalization and increasing competition from mainland Southeast Asia. In addition, because of rapacious logging, including unchecked clear-felling, by the early 1990s much of Diqing's most valuable hardwood species had also been largely depleted. Also, by the late 1990s, the Chinese central government had become increasingly concerned with

the impacts of deforestation. Massive floods that left 4100 people dead and millions homeless in Hubei, Anhui and Jiangsu Provinces in 1998 were blamed on deforestation. In response, the central government instituted a total logging ban in a number of catchment areas, including in northwest Yunnan. The primary source of local government revenue vanished overnight. Local government leaders were now forced to look elsewhere to replenish their coffers.

Even before the 1998 logging ban, local authorities had begun to look for alternative ways of developing the local economy. The growing wealth of China's eastern provinces and the emergence of a middle class increasingly interested and able to travel had created opportunities for the expansion of tourism.[i] Building on an already strong tourism industry just a few hours drive to the south in Lijiang and Dali, Diqing's local government decided to orient economic development policies toward tourism. However, as in many other parts of Tibetan China, Diqing was at that time a 'closed' area. Due to central government concerns over political and social stability in ethnic minority border regions, outsiders were not permitted to travel to Diqing without a permit. Diqing successfully applied for the travel restrictions to be partially lifted in 1994. When travel restrictions were completely removed in 1997 local authorities began in earnest to use tourism as the region's cornerstone for economic development. Infrastructure was the first challenge to overcome – the quality of roads and facilities were too poor to attract large numbers of visitors. Many of the first visitors to the region were intrepid foreign backpackers, visiting Zhongdian only as a side trip to their visits to the popular canal city of Lijiang, a few hours to the south. Local authorities began seeking grants and loans to expand infrastructure, including the region's first airport that was completed in 1999 and a better highway connection to Lijiang so that they could start to tap the growing mass tourism market.

The keystone of Diqing's tourism development strategy was a campaign to officially change the name of Zhongdian County, which no one had heard of, to Shangri-la (*Xianggelila*) County—a mythical paradise of international fame. The name Shangri-la originates from the novel *Lost Horizon* written by British author James Hilton in 1933 and turned into a blockbuster motion picture by Hollywood director Frank Capra in 1937. In the story, a group of four Westerners, including a British diplomat and an American hustler, flee a revolution in India in a small plane. The group veers off course and crash lands in a remote part of the Himalayas. They find themselves in a magical land of great beauty inhabited mostly by Tibetans, presided over by Buddhist and Christian clergy who are in turn guided by a centuries-old Capuchin monk. It is a place of inter-ethnic peace and harmony where time stands still.

When I first visited northwest Yunnan in 1999 and during a subsequent visit in 2001, local authorities were already referring to Zhongdian as the site of the "original" Shangri-la. Their campaign to change the county's name had already begun to stimulate local interest. Many Zhongdian locals believed that the British official and his fellow interlopers had actually crash landed somewhere near Zhongdian. During the Second World War many allied plans had crash landed in southwest China, including in the Diqing region. Such facts appear to have made the Shangri-la claims more convincing. Even though the Shangri-la story was written a decade before the war, most local residents at the time did not know the Hilton novel to be the source of the story. In 2002, the origins of Shangri-la were described as follows by a local travel website:

On a day at the beginning of the 20th century, an English aeroplane lost its direction in southwest of China and had to and a place for a emergency landing in the valley, the English were so surprised that there are such fascinating scenery before them: high snow-covered mountains, blue sky, dense primeval forests, deep and serene gorge, green grass-land, crystal clear water … Because of the language trouble, they could not communicate with the local people when they ask where they are. However, they heard a word and remembered: 'Shangri-la'.

Another Chinese website accurately referred to Hilton's novel as the source of the Shangri-la legend but claimed that it was based on a true story about an American plane that crashed in Zhongdian in 1944. I even met a Tibetan village head who claimed that he had a piece of the wrecked aircraft fuselage that his grandfather had passed down to him (Hillman 2003). Other travelers and visitors have reported other villagers to have made similar claims. Local stories like these were reinforced by articles in the Western and Chinese press between January and May 2002 which cited claims by Chinese authorities that Hilton had used Diqing as the backdrop for his story. The majestic Mt Kawaka to the north of Diqing was strikingly similar to the Blue Moon Mountain in Hilton's story. Some mentioned the presence of Christian communities in the western part of Diqing as a possible connection to the story. Others suggested that Hilton's earthly paradise was based on the descriptions of Austrian-born American botanist Joseph Rock who lived in the region from 1922 to 1949 and published extensively in the National Geographic magazine. But all of this is mere speculation because Hilton never visited China and because there is no direct evidence to suggest what inspired him.

The controversy surrounding the origins of the name did not deter local development planners. In 1996, county officials commissioned a "search party" to collect evidence to make a case for Zhongdian being the location of Shangri-la. More than 40 academics, including historians,

linguists, anthropologists and Tibetologists were involved in the project. Following their multidisciplinary investigations, a committee of experts submitted its report to local government confirming that Zhongdian was indeed the 'real' Shangri-la.[ii]

According to the expert report, the Chinese name for Shangri-la—*Xianggelila*—was a transliteration of the local Tibetan word *Sems kyi nyima zalwa*, which means "sun and moon in the heart". This philology is quite extraordinary considering that "*Xianggelila*" is a contemporary transliteration of "Shangri-la", and that many of the experts would have known the fictional origins of Hilton's earthly paradise. Nevertheless, drawing creatively on their research, the team of experts managed to turn four phonetic syllables created by an Englishman into four distinct words of local Tibetan origin. But accuracy would not be allowed to spoil Diqing's tourism potential. The goal was to seek formal approval from the State Council—the only body authorized to change place names in China—to change Zhongdian's name to Shangri-la. Local authorities now had the expert 'proof' they needed to support their quest.

In its petition, the county government used the experts' report to construct a number of arguments in support of the name change. Officials argued that, since olden times, the Tibetan people had been the main inhabitants of the region but that the name 'Zhongdian' was a Chinese name used only by the government and not by ordinary people. The name change, they argued, would be in the interests of social stability. They also suggested that the name change would demonstrate the Party's and the government's concern and commitment to the area and speed the development (*fazhan*) and civilizing (*wenming*) process of the Tibetan nationality. Like all successful local government proposals, the Zhongdian County documents paid adequate lip service to Communist Party catch phrases.

The Shangri-la campaign received a further boost in 1997 when Diqing hosted the inaugural Khampa Arts Festival—a biennial event designed to promote Eastern Tibet and Zhongdian as tourist destinations. In the festival's opening ceremony, Yunnan Provincial Vice Governor Dai Guanglu delighted the audience by announcing that Zhongdian was without doubt the 'original' location of Shangri-la (Kolås 2008). Provincial support would be vital in making the final pitch to the State Council. Momentum for the campaign continued to build, but took on new urgency in 2001 when it was rumoured that Daocheng County in Sichuan had also commissioned a group of experts to 'prove' that it was the location of the true Shangri-la. Zhongdian County officials used this real or imagined threat to convince Yunnan Provincial officials that they had to act fast to prevent Sichuan Province from staking its claim. The provincial government agreed to submit

a formal application to the State Council requesting that Zhongdian County be permitted to change its name to Shangri-la. Importantly, the provincial government's application argued that the name change would benefit not only tourism, but the general social development of the province. According to the application, this is because 'the name represents what people of all races are searching for—a desire that among people and between people and nature there be no conflict, no chaos (*qingluan*), only economic prosperity, national unity (*minzutuanjie*) and social stability'. It also suggested that the name change would help to make Diqing a 'leading' Tibetan area in China. The Shangri-la Project would become a model of how Tibetan communities could thrive in the People's Republic of China (Hillman 2010).

When State Council approval came on 17 December 2001, the county government and tourism developers were jubilant. Plans were immediately put into action for a grand celebration during the Zhongdian (now Shangri-la) Arts Festival in May 2002. County officials to formally announce the name change during the festival, and a detailed county government plan outlined the way that the name change would be celebrated. Shangri-la was to serve as the inspiration for economic development based on eco tourism (*shengtai lüyou*) as well as ethnic tourism (*minzu lüyou*). To prove its commitment to environmental conservation the county banned the use of plastic bags. In another effort to 'beautify' the town, police rounded up all beggars and put them on buses headed out of town. A prefecture official confided that the timing was important (it had to be just a few days prior to the event) because, if beggars were expelled too early, they could easily return in time for the festival. Other efforts to promote Shangri-la's cultural attractions include the creation of a new symbol based on the official interpretation of Xianggelila. It consists of the sun inside a crescent-shaped moon, designed to represent the supposed true meaning of Shangri-la—i.e. the sun and moon in one's heart. Diqing Television—the official local broadcaster—immediately adopted the motif.

The formal presentation of Shangri-la to the world was scheduled for the biennial Arts Festival in May 2002, when county authorities would officially declare the name change. The festivals, begun in 1997, were designed to showcase Shangri-la's rich cultural heritage. The 2002 festival was the perfect platform to launch Shangri-la as a new Tibetan-area tourist destination—one to rival Lhasa. The opening ceremony of the 2002 Arts Festival was held at the foot of a giant *thangka*, or Tibetan Buddhist painting, commissioned by the county government at great expense and reputed to be the largest ever made. After brief speeches by county and prefectural officials commemorating the name change and announcing the opening of the festival, the ethnic song-and-dance troupes began to emerge. The first group to enter the arena (a newly built local racecourse) was a group of Tibetan Gelugpa (yellow hat sect) monks in ceremonial garb and

bearing horn instruments. They completed the circuit of the racetrack before sitting at the foot of the *thangka* directly opposite the main grandstand of officials. Resplendent in their formal robes, the monks carried musical instruments normally used only in religious ceremonies. In a nod to the region's other ethnic groups, dance troupes representing the Naxi, Yi and other local ethnic minorities followed closely on the heels of the monks. Like many such official performances in China, the opening ceremony was designed to symbolize the unity of China's diverse nationalities (*minzu tuanjie*)—a Communist Party mantra. At the Sixth Khampa (Eastern Tibetan) Arts Festival held in 2010 in Diqing, authorities made an even grander gesture by including representatives from all 55 of China's officially recognized ethnic minority groups, even though most had no connection with the region.

The Khampa Arts festivals serve to remind us the extent to which the local state is involved in the representation of local culture. Indeed, because Tibetan culture is tourism's main drawcard, local authorities have been especially concerned with how local Tibetan culture is presented to the world outside Diqing, particularly to the middle class Chinese consumer. In 1999—the year the Diqing airport was opened—the Diqing Prefecture government provided Zhongdian's Songtsamlin Monastery—one of the largest monasteries in southeast Tibet with a grant of seven million *yuan* for renovations. Most of the funds were sued to spruce up the appearance of the monastery, including a new gilded rooftop, and for a new car park for tour buses. In front of the airport a Hollywood-style "welcome to Shangri-la" greeting was etched into the hillside using Tibetan script. The county also issued an ordinance requiring that the facades of all buildings in the town's main street, including government offices, should be constructed in a neo-Tibetan style. New hotels were built according to various interpretations of neo-Tibetan architecture. Between 2002 and 2010 the county seat was completely rebuilt in the faux Tibetan style, including the Diqing Prefecture hospital and the County Party Headquarters. A 20-metre tall golden prayer wheel—supposedly the biggest in the Tibetan world—was erected on a hill in the old town. One foreign journalist described his early impression of the new Shangri-la as a Tibetan "toy town" (McGregor 2002).

But local government plans did not stop at the facades of buildings. Plans were developed in 2002 to completely remodel the urban centre of Shangri-la. The centerpiece, completed in 2005, was the Mandala Square (*Tancheng Guangchang*)—a large public square dotted with bizarrely decorated neo-Tibetan buildings, designed by architects from Shanghai who noted in the plans that their designs would serve to promote Tibetan Buddhism. While these buildings did not look like anything ever built in Tibetan areas, according to one of the Han Chinese architects interviewed by Kolås (2008: 209), the neo-Tibetan style was based only on certain features of

traditional architecture such as the distance between the gatehouses and the appearance of the roof. Painted circles were used to represent what would have been timber drainage beams in a traditional local Tibetan house. According to the plans, the buildings in Mandala Square were intended to be used as museums, libraries or shops, but as of 2010 local authorities had still not decided how best to use the new public space. Most of the buildings remain empty behind their facades—an eerie reminder of the superficiality of the state-sponsored building project.

While some of the Tibetan "toy town" projects have failed to live up to their lofty objectives, from an economic perspective, the Shangri-la project has been a runaway success. The idea of paradise found on the Sino-Tibetan frontier clearly appealed to an emerging generation of domestic tourists with ever-increasing disposable incomes. Visits to the region increased steadily from 43,000 in 1995 to over one million in the year following the county's name change. In 2007 more than three million visits were recorded by local tourism authorities. In 2007 tourism revenue comprised RMB 3.2 billion of Diqing's regional GDP of RMB 4.4 billion, bringing GDP per capita to RMB 11,797 ($US1,580). By contrast, in neighbouring Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, GDP per capita was RMB 6,450 ($US864).[iii] In Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province—a prefecture with a similar size population to Diqing—GDP per capita was RMB 4,363 (US$585).[iv]

While GDP per capita is not a comprehensive guide to wellbeing and can mask inequalities in the distribution of wealth, tourism-led growth in Diqing has led to a restructuring of the economy that has been relatively inclusive—at least in comparison with many other Tibetan areas where the dominance of state-led infrastructure projects has led to dramatic income inequality (Fischer 2005; Hillman 2010). Agriculture now comprises only 15.7 per cent of Diqing's GDP, with industry and construction comprising 37.5 per cent and services accounting for 46.8 per cent. Importantly, tourism has allowed the private sector to flourish. The private sector share of Diqing's GDP in 2007 was RMB 2.06 billion or 46.82 per cent of the total. In other Tibetan areas the state sector is much more dominant in the economy—a situation which often creates opportunities only for a privileged minority with access to state jobs (Hillman 2010). Critically, Yunnan Province has promoted and supported small enterprises in private sector activity. Since 2003, local authorities have sensibly offered interest-free and low-interest loans to local residents for tourism-related start-ups. Local participation in tourism-led economic development has been supported by the work of NGOs such as the Eastern Tibet Training Institute, which provides vocational training free of charge to unemployed local youth.[v] While such programs operate independent of government, they receive occasional local government support.

From a political perspective, the Shangri-la project has also been a success. The Shangri-la project has been used by local authorities to promote Diqing as a 'leading' Tibetan area in China. Local authorities have used Diqing's success at maintaining social stability and promoting "development with Tibetan characteristics" as a means of lobbying higher levels of government for increased fiscal support. Local officials argue that Diqing deserves special attention because it is an example of a Tibetan area that 'works' in China (Hillman 2010). Diqing's experience contrasts with the negative image of China's Tibetan areas promoted by exile Tibetan groups. Local authorities in Diqing are aware that this will please the central government. In recognition of the region's success Diqing's prefecture governor from 1999-2008 was promoted to the position of prefecture part secretary. This is a big deal in China. While the heads of government in Tibetan autonomous regions are generally native Tibetans, party secretaries—the most powerful officials are generally not. Reflecting security concerns and the low levels of trust between ethnic Tibetans and the Chinese government in Tibetan areas, party secretaries are almost always Han Chinese officials appointed from outside the region. In 2010 Diqing was the only one of 12 Tibetan regions to have a native Tibetan serve as party secretary.[vi]

From a cultural perspective, the impact of the Shangri-la project is more ambiguous. The anthropological literature has generally viewed ethnic tourism as a threat to local culture, with leading voices suggesting that the commoditization of ethnic culture "robs people of the very meaning by which they organize their lives" (Greenwood 1989: 179).[vii] Britton (1991) argues that the 'commoditization of place' necessarily involved in the development of ethnic tourism creates a cultural 'flatness' whereby all sense of meaning and belonging is replaced by a superficial 'glitter, particular kinds of euphoria, and intensities of feelings'.[viii] Studies of ethnic tourism in China have been similarly critical of the effect of state-sponsored tourism on local cultures. In a wide-ranging study of ethnic tourism in the Dai areas of Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna) in southern Yunnan, Davis (2005) argues that "[t]he tourism industry appears to have created a kind of fractured consciousness. They are at one and the same time aware of how they look to the public eye, and of the multitude of ways in which they see themselves. After all, no one can really live in a theme park. For members of a dominant group, putting on ethnic costumes and posing for a souvenir photograph offers an opportunity for play and fantasy, but for members of the group itself, there is little playful about this kind of strictly constrained public self-representation. It is hard to perform without awkwardness, strain or irony."

In Shangri-la it is easy to find examples where ethnic tourism promotes distorted or perverse representations of local culture. With local government encouragement, small tourism

entrepreneurs in Shangri-la turned a number of the town's Tibetan farmhouses into entertainment venues where guests could eat Tibetan foods, drink Tibetan wine and enjoy performances of Tibetan song and dance. In 1999, the first farmhouse visits were performed inside local people's homes. Visitors sat around the fireplace and were entertained by food, song and dance. Between 2000 and 2010 scores of such farmhouses sprang up around the town. Mostly held in newly built, ornately decorated and brightly lit venues that exaggerated Tibetan architecture and furnishings, the performances resembled nothing of what would have occurred inside a Tibetan home, even during a major festival. They also tended to exaggerate Tibetan drinking culture, which plays to a particular minority stereotype in China. The costumes, food and performances were chosen randomly for their 'glitter' effect, and the combined mosaic appeared superficial (Kolås 2008).

The Tibetan farmhouse 'experience' is as an example of how ethnic tourism can simplify or "flatten" culture into something more readily digestible to the thrill-seeking visitor. But it also reflects a popular stereotype of China's minorities—one that associates minorities with primitiveness as expressed through song, dance, colourful costumes and promiscuity (Hillman and Henfry 2006). A number of studies of ethnic tourism in China have argued that such practices serve to reinforce ethnic hierarchies. Drawing on theories of internal orientalism, much of the English-language literature argued that the commoditization of ethnic minorities for tourist consumption reinforced patterns of domination by the majority Han Chinese, who make up 92 per cent of China's population. According to the internal orientalist logic, tourism allows ethnic minorities to be exploited by the dominant Han Chinese. Singing and dancing ethnic minorities 'perform' their cultural heritage in ways that reinforce their inferior or backward status and confirms stereotypes (Davis 2001; Schein 1997; Gladney 1994). Indeed, since the reforms and 'opening up' policies of the late 1970s, ethnic tourism has fit comfortably with state policies that define and categorized ethnic groups according to their distance from the Han (Mullaney 2011). During the 1950s Chinese social scientists, led by eminent anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, set about the task of producing a taxonomy of ethnic groups for the fledgling Communist administration. Inspired by Marx's and Morgan's ideas about the development of human society, they identified 55 distinct minority groups (chosen from among more than 400 claims of separate ethnicity), and each was placed along the line of (Marxist) human social development. The societies of ethnic minorities were seen as living proof of the lineal progression of human society from slave society to feudalism to capitalism to socialism, and finally, to communism. The majority Han were viewed as being at the forefront of progress, and it was believed that all other ethnic groups would follow their lead to higher stages of socialism and, eventually, communism.

The ethnic classification project of the 1950s continues to inform some government policies as well as the national education curriculum, highlighting the powerful role of the revolutionary state in constructing ethnic identities. In Shangri-la, the local state has also been active in promoting its own version of Tibetan heritage—one that similarly emphasizes the more innocuous dimensions of Tibetan—singing, dancing, dress, food and religion. Indeed, during the reform period, it was only through song, dance, dress and food that the ethnic minorities were allowed to express difference. In Shangri-la's official tourism promotion events and literature, there is no mention of independent local histories, institutions or differences in social organization and patterns of communication. Even the Tibetan Buddhist religion is relegated to ceremony and symbol—a visual feast—in the official representations, as seen in the parades at the Khampa Arts Festivals. Indeed, from this perspective, the Shangri-la project can be seen as an effort by the local state to promote such 'edited' versions of minority culture.

Local government interest in promoting edited versions of Tibetan culture even extends to the content of local songs. One of the most popular songs in eastern Tibet is "The Khampa Man" ("Kangba Hanzi" in Chinese), which literally means the Man of Eastern Tibet. Its chorus runs, "I'm a Khampa man in my heart—in my breast the wild and beloved grassland. . . . With barley wine in my veins, the whole world is in my hand. . . . even if the women hate me, I fly free." The Chinese version of the song rings out from karaoke bars across eastern Tibet. In 2002, however, local officials in Diqing decided that the lyrics projected a negative image of Tibetans in the eyes of Han Chinese and other tourists and sponsored a new recording of the song. In the new version, the lyrics "with barley wine in my veins" were changed to "with song in my heart." Karaoke bars and music stores in the Tibetan autonomous prefecture are encouraged to play the new version (Hillman and Henfry 2006).

Another example of local state intervention in the representation of local Tibetan culture was the 2002 ordinance that required all hotels, restaurants and shops to ensure that their signs were in the Tibetan script as well as in Chinese. This resulted in some very tortured Tibetan language appearing on shop fronts. Much of the early Tibetan script was a hasty transliteration of Chinese that literate Tibetans were unable to read. Because Tibetan literacy skills were in short supply, some shops ended up with comical Tibetan names. One skin beauty treatment clinic misspelled the word for "beauty" to tragically present itself as a "leprosy" clinic. Such stories serve as a reminder that the enforced use of the Tibetan script on the signs was directed at an external rather than a local Tibetan audience.

However, despite theses clumsy attempts to promote a sanitized version of Tibetan cultural heritage, it would be wrong to conclude that state-sponsored ethnic tourism has necessarily resulted in a "flattening" of local culture or that it has robbed Shangri-la locals of the meaning by which they organize their lives. There is ample evidence, in fact, that ethnic tourism has stimulated cultural regeneration and even cultural "deepening". As mentioned earlier, shop front signs in Shangri-la must now be in Tibetan as well as Chinese. While there are almost no ethnic Tibetans outside the monasteries in Shangri-la who can read and write Tibetan (including among those who are literate in Chinese), the policy has stimulated new local interest in written Tibetan. A community-based group was established in early 2002 with the intention of correcting all the mistakes in the signs and promoting the use of the written script. Young Tibetans are seeing their script outside the monasteries for the first time. Ethnic Tibetan workers and investors relocating to Shangri-la from India and other Tibetan areas in China are proud of their literacy skills and, on more than one occasion, I have observed non-local Tibetans 'teasing' Shangri-la locals for not being able to read their own language. While these influences are not likely to lead to an immediate increase in Tibetan literacy, the attention that the script is receiving around town has the potential to stimulate that interest as well as renewed pride in local cultural heritage. As tourism develops, more sophisticated representations of Tibetan culture have emerged. Higher quality Tibetan artisan shops now compete with interloping trinket sellers. The pseudo-Tibetan farmhouse visits have also lost their popularity as other attractions take their place. As tourism grows there are continuous opportunities for the reinvention or reinterpretation of Tibetan cultural heritage—not all of which can be controlled by the state's Shangri-la project.

What is often missed in many sociological or political studies of ethnicity is the myriad ways in which minority peoples express their identities among themselves. During the Shangri-la Arts Festival I took the opportunity to move among the crowds where I got a strong sense of local Tibetans' excitement at recognizing cultural performances from their hometowns—Nixi, Geza, Benzilan, Xiao Zhongdian. Many of the spectators, themselves dressed in minority nationality garb, were dancing and singing in a less organized and more spontaneous fashion than the performers on stage. The festival provided a forum for the people of Shangri-la to celebrate their cultural traditions in their own way. The Shangri-la Arts Festival was an opportunity to see where official and popular identities diverge, but also converge. During the week following the opening ceremony the streets of Shangri-la's county seat were full of celebrants. In the main square outside the sports stadium, the county government had organized bonfires around which groups of people could dance in the evenings. The core dance groups were organized by the local government, but so many others joined in that other circles formed away from the bonfires. Tibetans from all over the county and prefecture would dance a particular dance until someone

called out for another, and the movements would change. Once again, the outdoor dancing was part of the 'official' festival, but it also provided a space for spontaneous expressions of ethnic identity among participants. Here, locals were performing for themselves and not for tourists, but the development of ethnic tourism provided them with the platform to publicly celebrate their culture in a way that was not possible in the past.

As noted above, the opportunities created by tourism have attracted Tibetans from other parts of the plateau and beyond to come to Shangri-la in search of work. During the street festivities of the Arts Festival, I accompanied a group of Tibetan tour guides to the main square, where each took turns showing off the dances and songs of his or her home area to other Tibetans. There were men and women from Dechen, Dege, Lithang, Markham and Lhasa, and even some who had returned from living among the Tibetan exile communities in India. All were delighted to try out each other's songs and dances, some of which were familiar to them and others not. On other occasions, I observed Tibetan tour guides' amusement at the strangeness of each other's Tibetan dialects. Not so long ago, these people would have considered each other quite alien. One evening, I sat in a teahouse with a *tulku* (a reincarnate lama known as a *huofuo* 'living Buddha' in Chinese) and a monk from Sichuan. We were joined by other ethnic Tibetans, one of whom was a senior officer of the county Public Security Bureau (PSB), two returnees from India and two women from the Prefecture Tourist Bureau. The officer from the PSB asked the *tulku* for a blessing, while the other monk reprimanded the woman from the Tourism Bureau for not being able to read or write Tibetan. He said that Tibetans must study to preserve their culture, and the head of the PSB strongly agreed. The policeman went on to say that Tibetans were a great nationality in China and that the reason that China did not succeed in the 2002 World Cup was because there were no Tibetans on the team. I asked him if he was a Party member. He said that he was, but that he was first and foremost a Tibetan. While this man's pride doubtless pre-dates 'Shangri-la', the new attention that Tibetan culture and identity receives allows him to express that pride in a manner that would have been politically dangerous dfor an ordainry citizen let alone an employee of the state in an earlier era. The many exchanges that are taking place between visitors from other Tibetan areas (monks, businesspeople, guides, students) are also contributing to the awareness and building of a stronger pan-Tibetan identity within China.

State policies will continue to seek to control Tibetan identity formation, but local identities will evolve in their own ways. One pertinent example can be found in the state training of tour guides. In Shangri-la, all guides must be registered with the Tourism Bureau that organizes regular training sessions. Guides are trained and tested about the essential characteristics of ethnic minorities that are to be relayed to tourists. Two middle school teachers are regularly invited to

conduct the training sessions. One teaches guides about local cultural and scenic attractions. The other teaches guides about socialist modernization, government policy regarding tourism and what is considered politically appropriate behaviour on the part of the guides. If, for example, they are asked about the importance of the Dalai Lama to Tibetans, they are instructed to answer that they do not know about such things. The Shangri-la Guide's Handbook, an internal (*neibu*) foreign affairs and tourist bureau publication, has plenty of information about ethnic dress, food and song, but nothing about the independent history, culture or patterns of social communication of these groups outside of the boundaries of the modern Chinese state. They are tested ion these facts and on their fluency in standard Chinese (*putonghua*) before they are licensed to work. Even though guides are 'educated' in the official version of what it means to be ethnic, the state cannot control the many ways that the guides will experience, understand and convey their own ethnicity through their work in the industry. The guides' frequent contact with outsiders (other Chinese and foreign) gives them numerous opportunities to consider what being Tibetan means to them.

A further example of the inherent tension between ethnic tourism's potential for promoting sanitized versions of ethnicity tourism and its potential for raising ethnic consciousness can be seen in Shangri-la's giant prayer wheel, erected by the Shangri-la County government in 2002 to commemorate the county's name change to Shangri-la (*Xianggelila*). The 20-metre high golden prayer wheel is inscribed with images of all of China's 56 nationalities, symbolizing the unity of the nation. Named the "Fortunate Victory" Prayer Wheel, it also serves as a reminder of the victory of the People's Liberation Army in 1949. But the giant golden prayer wheel also serves as a reminder of the centrality of Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism in the local community—something to be celebrated and embraced. And many ethnic Tibetans treat it as if it were a holy prayer wheel, arriving daily to assist its rotation in an anticlockwise direction while reciting their own prayers.

Another striking aspect of ethnic tourism has been its connection with the revival of Tibetan Buddhist religion. Religious revival had been gaining paces since the 1980s when, in the wake of the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, religious policies were liberalized. While the Chinese Party-state continues to exercise control over organized religion (e.g. by regulating the number of monks and overseeing the implementation compulsory 'patriotic education'), policies since the 1980s, including compensation and direct state funding of monasteries, have allowed for a sustained revitalization of monastic life. There are now an estimated 120,000 Tibetan monks and nuns in China out of a total population of approximately 5.4 million Tibetans (Kapstein 2004).

By placing added value on cultural heritage, tourism has given Tibetan Buddhism a boost in profile. While the situation varies from one region to another, in Shangri-la where Tibetan culture is celebrated as the keystone of local development strategies, the local monastery has enjoyed growing influence in local society. As a showcase of the region's cultural heritage, the monastery is a prime tourism asset. Local government has pumped millions of dollars into its renovation and expansion. It has become increasingly popular for young Tibetan men to join the monastery and many of the large number of applicants are unsuccessful. Senior monks command more and more resources and enjoy increasing clout with local authorities. A number of Buddhist monks in Diqing with whom I have spoken see pros and cons with tourism. Several Buddhist monks expressed a view that increased government funding has helped to refurbish parts of the monastery. Monasteries in Diqing are richer than they have been in decades thanks to revenues from entrance tickets and donations from visitors. Sometimes this revenue is used to sponsor younger monks to pursue higher studies in monasteries that offer more advanced Buddhist training in other parts of Tibetan China and in India. While some monks admit to being annoyed at tourists poking their nose into every corner of the monastery, new facilities and management arrangements have helped to minimize the impact of tourism on monastic life. Important areas are cordoned off periodically to prevent disruptions to religious activities.

Tourism's benefits for religious activities in Diqing are not necessarily replicated in other parts of Tibetan China and must therefore be understood in the broader context of Diqing Prefecture's social policies (Hillman 2010). In Diqing there have been fewer restrictions on cultural and religious expression than in other parts of Tibetan China. Since the mid 1990s Diqing has adopted one of Tibetan China's more liberal approaches to Tibetan Buddhism. Unlike in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other parts of Tibetan China, government officials in Diqing are free to visit monasteries and other religious sites. This has created space for Communist Party and government officials to develop meaningful and equitable relationships with local religious leaders. It is not uncommon in Diqing to see government officials and monks meeting informally and dining together.

This approach has created space for Buddhist clergy to participate in local policy making. For the last decade, monasteries have been involved in key local development decisions. In 2003 the Songtsamlin Monastery in Diqing won a battle with a local government department over the ownership of revenues from entrance tickets. In 2004, the same monastery vetoed a plan to develop a tourist precinct close to its main entrance. In many instances of local decision-making that I have documented over the years, it is clear that genuine relationships between government

and Party leaders and Buddhist clergy have facilitated mutual understanding and cooperation. When there has been conflict, monastic representatives have been successful at applying pressure on the local government by sending ever larger delegations of monks to government offices. The larger the delegation, the more nervous local authorities become. As one might expect, relations between the local state and the monastery have not always been harmonious. There have been conflicts and occasional violence, but authorities have generally relied on personal relationships between officials and senior monks to settle disputes. The ability of local leaders to prevent conflict and settle disputes quickly is considered an important criterion for promotion within China's local government. In other parts of Tibetan China where personal relationships between government officials and clergy are weak or non-existent, it is more common for local authorities to use coercion in dealing with conflicts.

Local officials I interviewed admitted that monastic support for local policies and programs because was important because the views of the Buddhist clergy influenced local public opinion. Even those that criticized the influence of the monastery as an example of Tibetans' "backwardness" conceded it was a reality that had to be accommodated. This situation is not necessarily reflective of all Tibetan areas, however. In Lhasa and many parts of eastern Tibet monastic activities have been more tightly controlled, resulting in periodic outbursts such as the protests in March 2008. Nevertheless, the potential for ethnic tourism to strengthen the position of religious institutions vis-à-vis local government remains undiminished, especially when tourism becomes the mainstay of the local economy.

This is significant. It was not that long ago in China that people were ridiculed and even persecuted for displaying ethnic or religious (ideological) difference. Minority children were taught that their cultural heritage was backward—something to be ashamed of—and this was true for most minority nationalities in China. Ethnic tourism—as kitsch as some of the cultural hybrids may appear to be—contributes to a process of ethnic identity formation and reformulation, prompting a reevaluation of people once thought backward or barbaric. Ethnic tourism has the power to raise ethnic consciousness and rekindle pride in local cultural heritage. This process is certainly underway in Shangri-la where local Tibetans are actively involved in the reinvention of their ethnic identity. Community-based expressions of identity are not always at loggerheads with official representations. In fact, by providing a new platform for the articulation and celebration of local cultural heritage, ethnic tourism might provide opportunities to bridge the gap between ethnic identities as they are experienced and official representations of those identities. Ethnic tourism in that sense becomes a new arena of contestation and negotiation of local cultural identities. The Shangri-la experience also suggests that ethnic

tourism can provide a vehicle for promoting respect of minority cultures. Han Chinese who visit Tibetan areas—those I have spoken with at least—generally return with a new sense of appreciation for Tibet, its rich heritage and its distinctiveness. Following the horrific social upheavals across Tibetan China in early 2008, we can only hope that greater contact between Chinese from the east and Tibetans will lead to greater understanding and sensitivity. Ethnic tourism could provide part of the solution to changing public opinion among China's increasingly prosperous and educated middle classes. This might pave the way to more enlightened Chinese government policies in the region—policies that enable Tibetans to reconcile their dual identities as ethnic Tibetans and as Chinese citizens.

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[i] To stimulate tourism and domestic spending in 2000 the central government formally declared week-long holidays for all state employees in May (Labor Day), October (National Day) and in January/February (Chinese New Year). Between 2002 and 2007, national revenue from domestic tourism doubled from RMB 387 billion to RMB 777 billion. Source: China Statistical Yearbook 2008.

[ii] The title of the county government document was 'Guanyu Yunnan Sheng Diqing Zangzu Zizhizhou Zhongdian Xian Gengming wei Xianggelila Xian de Qingshi' ('Application Concerning the Name Change of Yunnan Province, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Zhongdian County to Shangri-la County'). Diqing officials generally use the original English spelling "Shangri-la" or "Shangri-La" in English-language documents—a practice emulated in the tourist literature. "Xianggelila" is the standard Chinese romanization (*pinyin*) for the name Shangri-la.

[iii] While GDP figures in China are not always reliable, they are nevertheless useful as an indication of the relative scale of economic activity.

[iv] GDP per capita figures for Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture are from 2005—the most recent available on the prefecture government's website.

[v] See the Eastern Tibet Training Institute's website: www.etti.org.cn.

[vi] Just under half of China's 5.5 million Tibetans live within the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)—the provincial level administrative unit most closely associated with the name "Tibet". Just over half of China's ethnic Tibetans live outside this region in territories that have been incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan.[vi] These territories are administered as sub-provincial autonomous prefectures and counties. In total, China's Tibetan areas span over 2,000,000 km2—approximately one fifth of China's territory.

[vii] Cited in Kolås (2008), *Tourism and Tibetan Culture in* Transition, p 26.

[viii] Stephen Britton, 'Tourism, Capital, and Place: Towards a Critical Geography of Tourism', *Society and Space* no. 9, pp. 465–6, cited in Oakes, 'Ethnic Tourism in rural Guizhou', p. 1.