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# The Construction of Touristic Modernity in Xizhou

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# The Construction of Touristic Modernity in Xizhou

## Abstract

Tim Oakes' (1998) concept of touristic modernity accurately describes how the Chinese national discourse surrounding tourism, as both a tool for economic growth and nation-building, has shaped what the local reality has become for many towns and villages in the peripheral regions of China, especially those with large populations of ethnic minorities. Specifically in the Dali Bai Autonomous Region, foreign tourism followed by nostalgia-fueled domestic tourism has transformed Dali into a commercialized tourist destination, which has begun to spill out to other towns around the lake such as Xizhou. Touristic modernity is not, however, a singular homogenous force that culturally and physically transforms a given location overnight; instead, the construction of touristic modernity is a process that involves multiple contributing actors. In Xizhou, where the construction of touristic modernity is in its beginning stages, three main actors who are contributing to this process can be identified: domestic tourists, the Linden Centre, and local people.

## Keywords

China, Tourism, Modernity, Yunnan, Dali

## Disciplines

Chinese Studies | Tourism | Tourism and Travel

## Comments

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF TOURISTIC MODERNITY IN XIZHOU

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Asian Studies 460: Individualized Study-Research  
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## **Introduction: “Touristic Modernity” in China**

One clear difference between the historical contexts of Chinese and Western tourism development is the role of the state in the production and promotion of the domestic tourism industry as a vehicle of modernization. In the past sixty-seven years the Chinese government has gone through a series of changes in tourism policy, which can be categorized into three main groups: “politics only”, “politics plus economics”, and “economics over politics” (Yew et al. 2003, 24-25). The “politics only” period began after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 when China’s economic system was still centrally planned. The state rhetoric regarding tourism of any kind was largely negative, claiming that it was “representative of a bourgeois capitalist lifestyle” in direct conflict with the nation’s communist agenda (Yew et al. 2003, 15). Because of the cultural views surrounding leisure travel, all “tourism”, a term used loosely in this case, was essentially a foreign affairs activity limited to Chinese diplomats travelling outside China and foreign diplomats as well as overseas Chinese travelling to China. Because of China’s centrally planned economy and treatment of tourism as a matter of foreign affairs, by the mid-1970s any and all services related to tourism “were tightly controlled by the national government, including visas, travel permits, tour pricing, places to visit, and tour guides”, even hotels and transportation services were run by state enterprises and were directly connected to the Foreign ministry (Yew et al. 2003, 25-27).

The status of tourism as a whole changed with the implementation of the Economic Reforms and Open-door Policies of 1979, which began changing China’s centrally planned economy and ushered in the period of “politics plus economics”. During this period, control of China’s tourism services was transferred from the Foreign Ministry to the State Council, which began the “macromanagement of the tourism industry through the development of long-term,

medium-term, and yearly tourism plans for the whole nation” (Yew et al. 2004, 26). The 1979 policies loosened restrictions on the mobility of Chinese citizens, allowing them greater freedom to travel domestically, but the state government was politically and economically focused on developing inbound foreign tourism and even actively discouraged the development of domestic tourism (Wang 2004, 49). In an ordinance issued in 1981 called “The Decisions on Strengthening the Work of Tourism”, the State Council stated that “domestic tourism should *not* be encouraged, and that tourist attractions should be protected from the damages caused by overcrowding of domestic tourists” (Wang 2004, 49). The state government further showed its economic and political preference for non-Chinese foreign tourism by instituting “discriminatory pricing policies”, which prioritized access to tourist sites, accommodations, and services for foreign tourists of non-Chinese-origin based on the fact that the government charged them more than Chinese citizens, overseas Chinese, and tourists from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan (Yew et al. 2003, 24-25).

The third period of Chinese tourism policy, the period of “economics over politics”, began in 1985 when the increasing number of domestic tourists coupled with the lack of “tourist facilities and infrastructures, especially of transport and accommodations”, caused the State Tourism Bureau to issue a report supporting the development of domestic tourism due to “its potential economic contributions and employment potentials” (Wang 2004, 49). The state shifted its sole promotion of inbound tourism to include domestic tourism as it began to recognize that domestic tourism is a service industry that is “seen to require less investment, yet have quicker results, better efficiency, larger employment potential, and a greater potential to improve people’s livelihoods” (Yew et al. 2003, 25). Essentially, the role of domestic tourism in the view of the state became primarily economic as it could be harnessed as a lucrative economic tool. In

the early 1990s China's economic system began to shift towards a market economy, which increased the income among Chinese citizens and thus increased the demand for tourist services while the state's direct control in tourist services continued to diminish. By the late 1990s travel services had begun to be "operated independently from any direct government organizations, even though many [were] still state owned" and foreign enterprises began to invest in the industry (Yew et al. 2003, 28).

The promotion of domestic tourism took on a new economic function in the 1990s when the over-production of consumer goods coupled with the lack of consumer demand caused the Chinese economy to experience deflation (Wang 2004, 52). The state turned to the fairly new domestic tourism industry in order to resolve the excess of consumer goods by institutionally creating consumer demand through the creation of three "Golden Weeks" in 1999 during which "residents are encouraged to go out for leisure travel" during nationally recognized holidays (Wang 2004, 52). The implementation of Golden Weeks has been extremely successful in stimulating the economy because it creates leisure time (mostly among the urban population) due to the "official removal of temporal obstacles to tourism", which encourages Chinese citizens to travel domestically and creates a demand for travel services, packaged tours, transportation, hotels, and other touristic accommodations and services (Wang 2004, 52). In addition to official policies promoting tourism, the mass media, which is run by the state, has also played a large role in promoting tourism through travel magazines, newspaper advertisements, television programs, and the Internet (Wang 2004, 54). Through the institution of mass media the state seeks to persuade citizens that tourism is an appealing and a necessary part of the "attractive modern life-style", and "[fosters] consumerist orientation towards travel and tourism" (Wang 2004, 54). Thus, from Ning Wang's (2004, 56) sociological perspective, the Chinese tourist is in

not in control, “tourism is no longer an individual act of free will, but rather an embodiment of structural, cultural and institutional forces ‘behind’ tourist acts”. In other words, tourism is a social product, “the result of material, structural, cultural, and institutional transformations of China’s urban society” (Wang 2004, 56). Essentially, this use of domestic tourism as a means to economic success has not only encouraged the practice of using tourism as a sort of shortcut to economic success on local levels, but has also set the standards for what type of consumer behavior a modern domestic tourist should engage in.

“Touristic modernity” is a key term used by Tim Oakes (1998) in *Tourism and Modernity in China* that describes the experiences and realities that tourism has created in this context, especially in China’s peripheral regions with large ethnic minority populations, and is also the key concept that forms the research question of this paper. In addition to studying the promotion of touristic consumerism among urbanites, Oakes (1998) uses this term in Guizhou to study how various local government entities and capitalist forces bring about modernity and economic prosperity in local communities. Oakes (1998) also examines another function of tourism, how it shapes and transforms the local reality as a nation-building tool that packages, standardizes, and commercializes local cultures for touristic consumption.

The PRC state government’s ideal goal of nation-building is to have a politically, economically, socially, and culturally “unified and modernized” nation-state, but the ethnic minorities and their own individual cultures in the peripheral regions have presented a challenge to this integration (Oakes 1998, 131). The state, at the highest level, saw this problem as an opportunity to pick and choose what aspects of “non-Han” minority culture are acceptable and can be used to “invent a placed, museumified, and all-but-lost folk tradition upon which to build a sense of popular solidarity” to form a basis for, above all else, cultural integration (Oakes 1998,

131). Domestic tourism has been used as means of implementing cultural, social, political, and economic integration not only because it “costs the state much less to ‘open’ a region to tourism than it does to implement other modernization schemes” but also because tourism is generally welcomed by local people as a supplement to their income as well as a means of “[bringing] modernity right to the villagers’ doorsteps, a welcome alternative to chasing it in far-flung places” (Oakes 1998, 132-133). Part of this process of modernization and cultural integration occurs at the local level through a process called *wenhua fazhan*, or cultural development.

*Wenhua fazhan* is the process of determining what aspects of minority culture are displayed or are made to be more “civilized”, which often focuses on developing and modernizing as well as the standardization of the culture of ethnic minorities (Oakes, 136-138). Although *wenhua fazhan* was in play before tourism was introduced, it now goes hand-in-hand with the tourism function of standardization and is carried out by local government and cultural elites who serve as brokers or gatekeepers. In addition, Oakes (1998) also takes into account divergent local experiences and responses as a way to find out how the locals perceive the changes tourism has made as well as their role in those changes, which can be called “modern subjectivity”, a concept that will be discussed in more detail later.

Much previous scholarship regarding tourism has been focused on discussing the impacts of tourism on a particular place; however, in *Tourism and Modernity in China*, Tim Oakes (1998) begins to shift the focus of tourism studies from impact studies to a more holistic study of the processes of how tourism leads to impact by taking into account different actors as well as historical and social context. Oakes (1998) utilizes the fieldwork he carried out in rural villages in Guizhou province to demonstrate how different actors such as local government, the national discourse regarding ethnic minorities, and the modern subjectivity of local people contribute the



construction of touristic modernity and thus the reshaping of the local reality. This more holistic and complex insight into the processes of tourism not only provides a very useful framework for studying how touristic modernity has been constructed in other places in China, but also brings more awareness in general to the importance of examining different actors and the roles they play in tourism instead of regarding tourism as a homogenous entity.

Then how has touristic modernity been constructed in Xizhou? Following the lead of Tim Oakes, I hope to explain the process of how touristic modernity is being constructed in Xizhou, instead of only the impacts of tourism, through three main actors: domestic tourists, the Linden Centre, which is an American-run hotel and heritage preservation center, and the local people of Xizhou. In order to examine the concept of touristic modernity specifically in regard to Xizhou, the above historical and economic factors must be taken into account, as Xizhou is mainly populated by people of the Bai ethnic minority and is located in Yunnan province, one of China's peripheral regions.

### **Fieldwork and Methodology**

The town of Xizhou, or *Xizhou zhen*, is located in Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture (*Dali Baizu Zizhizhou*) of China's southwestern Yunnan province, only a six-hour train ride away from the province's capital city, Kunming. As the name of the prefecture suggests, the majority of the people who live within its borders, after Han Chinese, are of the Bai ethnic minority, one of the 56 officially government-recognized ethnic groups who have been historically recognized for their agrarian lifestyle, cormorant fishing, local *Benzhu* religion, and indigo tie-dye works, among many other aspects. The main center of attraction for domestic tourists in the prefecture is Dali Old Town (*Dali Gucheng*), once a center of regional power in the ninth century that is strategically located in a valley protected on one side by the sprawling Cangshan mountain range

and by the massive Erhai lake on the other. Presently, the mountains and lake play an important role in the culture, traditions, and religion of the Bai as well as in attracting tourists with the promise beautiful natural scenery.

The introduction of tourism in Dali can be explained through Beth Notar's (2006) analysis of three popular representation of Dali, namely the 1959 film *Five Golden Flowers* (*Wuduo Jinhua*) and a guidebook published by The Lonely Planet in 1984 (2006, 3). The Lonely Planet guidebook initially played a large role in attracting not domestic but international tourists to a place "off the beaten track" where one could "view exotic minority peoples", however, the book ended up "[encouraging] tens of thousands of transnational travelers to trek to the town over two decades" (2006, 3). As a result of the large amount of international tourists, *Yangren Jie*, or "Foreigner Street", was formed and local as well as outside entrepreneurs opened "several blocks of banana pancake cafés, beer joints, and sukiyaki shops"; eventually the international tourists who had come to see "authentic" Dali had become "the objects of exotic interest for crowds of cosmopolitan Chinese tourists" (2006, 1).

Like the Lonely Planet guidebook, the 1959 film *Five Golden Flowers* also attracted tourists to Dali, but only domestic tourists. Set in Dali, the musical film was released in 1959 to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the founding of the PRC and praises the early socialist values of Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, "modernization, agricultural collectivization, and women's liberation through a boy-meets-girl(s) love story amongst the Bai people" (Notar 2006, 47-48). The film also served as a political tool to incorporate the borderlands of China into the socialist whole through the "standardization of language, culture, and ideology", for example, the actors only speak in Mandarin even though the Bai people they represent have their own language and dialects, and the characters are portrayed as having completely accepted the

socialist values and lifestyle promoted by the state while still retaining aspects of Bai culture. Beth Notar (2006, 48) writes that a film that celebrates the failed Great Leap Forward was eventually used to promote Dali as a tourist destination because it plays off of the domestic tourists' "utopian nostalgia", "a reflection on a dream of socialist utopia during the current time of intensified cynicism"; in other words, the rapid economic and social changes that came about during the reform era caused a longing for a more structured way of life. Because of this longing for the Dali depicted in the film, the authenticity sought by the domestic tourist is different from that of the international tourist, many domestic tourists expect Dali to be "a place that mimics its filmic representation" (Notar 2006, 48).

Presently, Dali Old Town has now become home to a burgeoning art scene of Chinese and foreigners and is composed of interesting mix of new and old Bai architecture with many hostels and endless rows of restaurants and shops selling a range of items from rose cakes and African drums to hand crafted silver and antiques. Dali Old Town remains an extremely popular destination for domestic tourists, especially those who participate in packaged tours, but as the area becomes more and more commercialized some domestic tourists have moved on from Dali Old Town in search of more "authentic" Bai villages around the lake. Xizhou, which lies twenty kilometers north of Dali Old Town, has become one of these "authentic" places in the last five years, and as a result has begun to undergo the process of constructing touristic modernity. The town itself is composed of multiple villages but the main center of attraction is *Xizhou cun* or Xizhou Village where an official Xizhou Old Town (*Xizhou Guzhen*) has been established. In the past five years or so, Xizhou Village and smaller villages in the immediate areas bordering Xizhou Village have begun to change as local people transform their own businesses and as outsiders, both domestic and foreign, move in and open businesses catered towards tourists.

In order to explain how touristic modernity is being constructed in Xizhou I will be relying on research I conducted in May of 2016 as a part of the School of International Training's study abroad program, "China: Language, Cultures, and Ethnic Minorities" in addition to examining relevant literature on the topics of tourism and modernity in China. The research I conducted in May of 2016 was carried out over the course of fifteen days in which I stayed at a hostel in Xizhou and pertains to the topic of the development and effects of tourism in Xizhou. In this research I identified three groups of people who both affect and have been affected by tourism in Xizhou: local people, domestic tourists, and foreign expatriates. Within these categories I interviewed a total of twelve people: five local people, five domestic tourists, and two foreign expatriates. Because this research was conducted in an extremely short period of time there are many limitations regarding time, lack of interview structure, and lack of in depth questions, especially about the role of the local government; however, I do feel that my research did yield a good amount of general information.

### **Domestic Tourists**

In much of Western tourism literature, especially Dean MacCannell's (1976) *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, the tourist is represented as a symbol of modernity, seeking to escape alienation brought on by daily life in the modern world. The tourist attempts to escape this alienation through the misplaced search for authenticity in other cultures to reaffirm his or her own place in the modern world; however, due to the demands of the tourist to view and consume cultural aspects different from his or her own, authenticity is often constructed or "staged" in order to fit within the ideals of the tourist. Thus, tourism can be interpreted as a paradoxical product of modernity that serves to repair the alienation of the tourist from the modern world, but in doing so destroys the "authenticity" of the culture or community that is

subjected to the tourist's gaze and replaces it with a "staged" version. Although domestic tourism in China has followed a unique developmental path, it contributes to the construction of touristic modernity in a similar process to the one MacCannell describes, it constructs yet destroys authenticity.

Chinese domestic tourism has been largely represented in the form of all-inclusive packaged tours organized through travel services; a "convenient and secure" way to travel that ensures accommodations. Eventually, this type of tourism was assigned a high "sign value"; in other words, participants in packaged tours socially distinguish themselves from other tourists because they are "stoking-up on cultural capital" as well as gaining prestige or "earning one's 'face'" (Munt 1994, 109; Wang 2004, 53-54). At nearly any well known tourist site in China, from the Forbidden City in Beijing to the streets of Dali Old Town, some types of travel agency-organized packaged tours can be seen; a typically large group of tourists, sometimes all wearing the same hat or shirt, follows one guide, sometimes wearing an ethnic minority costume, who leads the group with a flag and provides information by speaking through a microphone. Clearly, packaged tours are not only visually differentiated from one another but also from those who are not participating in them.

Although packaged tours remain a popular choice in travel for many Chinese domestic tourists, there is an increasing population of young tourists that fall under the concept of the "new petit bourgeoisie", which is summarized by Ian Munt (1994, 107-11) as a class of people who "have deemed themselves unclassifiable, 'excluded', 'dropped out' or, perhaps, in popular tourism discourse 'alternative'" and who seek "the claim of cultural superiority, of true and real contact with indigenous people, which is pursued through organized tours such as 'overlanding' and 'individual' travel". These tourists also use tourism as a means of "stoking-up on cultural

capital” but their overall habitus, their behavior, differs from that of tourists that participate in packaged tours in that their cultural capital is expressed through “taste” rather than “face”. Instead of participating in tours led by travel agencies in order to display their social status, these “new petit bourgeoisie” strike out on their own journeys to “[seek] authenticity in the Chinese landscape and minorities” in what can be called a “tourist counterculture”, which “embraces frugality, individualism, and seclusion” (Munt 1994, 107; Nyíri 2006, 88). Due to the less rigid form of travel these tourists engage in, Pál Nyíri (2006, 88-89) has compared them to Western backpackers; however, he claims that Chinese backpackers are different from their Western counterparts, “Western backpacker discourse distinguishes itself from the mainstream tourist discourse by being down-to-earth and even cynical about tourist activities, the Chinese backpacker language is highly poetic, focused on experiencing the sublime, with no room for reflection on tourism or irony”. What is suggested here is that even though Chinese backpacker discourse has borrowed its ideas of modernity from Western backpacker discourse, Chinese backpacker tourism has not escaped from the mindset of “mainstream tourism” because “it valorizes authentic experiences, [but] it is not concerned with the ‘authenticity’ of art or architecture in the same way Western tourist discourse is” (Nyíri 2006, 88). While Chinese “backpacker” tourism may not be wholly distinguishable from mainstream Chinese domestic tourism, the responses I obtained from my interviews tend to disagree with the reasoning Nyíri has provided in his argument, namely pointing out that what is “authentic” is subjective and that authenticity is not always the most prominent motivational factor these “backpacker” tourists. From what I understand, the “backpacker”-type domestic tourists I interviewed do recognize contradictions in what is and is not “authentic”; however, the focus on self-reflection, to discover

something about oneself during travel is arguably the more important aspect of what makes and “authentic” travel experience.

Upon first look in Xizhou it is clear that domestic tourism has begun to reach the small town and that touristic modernity is shaping the local reality: hotels have cropped up across from the main entrance, electric golf carts shuttle guests around and within the main village, and young women wearing Bai minority clothing lead short walking tours from the main entrance of the village to the central square, which is filled with restaurants, souvenir shops, and stands selling *Xizhou baba*, a local specialty bread. Most of the domestic tourists who participate in the tours, however, do not typically stay for a full day let alone stay overnight in Xizhou, but the town does have approximately eight boutique hotels and hostels that cater to a different type of clientele, the “new petit bourgeoisie” or “backpacker” type tourists discussed above. The hostel I stayed in during my time in Xizhou was one such place, owned by a young couple originally from Northeastern China and Hangzhou, located in a traditional Bai-style compound that had been completely transformed and painted into a hip, bohemian place reminiscent of some of the hostels found in Dali Old Town. While staying in that hostel I met a variety of individuals, all independent tourists, five of whom I interviewed in order to gain a general understanding of why they chose to come to Xizhou, and whose answers provide insight into how they contribute to the construction of touristic modernity.

Despite differences in the interviews I conducted, there are a few common themes throughout their responses, for example, none of the five individuals participated in packaged tours, they had foregone the “security” of an all-inclusive, travel agency-organized vacation and instead opted for a more spontaneous experience, what could be considered “tourist counterculture” (Nyíri 2006, 88). In addition, all five of the tourists I interviewed came to

Xizhou from their homes in densely populated urban areas, seeking an escape from the pressures of daily life, school, and work in a rural setting completely different from their home atmospheres; in other words, seeking authenticity in lives and locations seemingly opposite from what they experience daily in order to find a sort of self-fulfillment. For example, Miu, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Hong Kong, was travelling with her friend to celebrate their recent graduation from university and came to Yunnan province with a general plan of where they wanted to go but had not made any reservations for accommodations or travel arrangements ahead of time, they were deciding what they wanted to do on day by day basis. When speaking with Miu about why she decided to come to Yunnan, she said “because here it’s so different from Hong Kong, I hope to discover something new about myself”. Xiong and Jingling, two women in their mid twenties, quit their high-pressure jobs in Beijing and began travelling in southwestern China without a set itinerary. An excerpt from a travel blog Xiong posted on the social media platform WeChat reads, “following a sentence from the book *Everything I Never Told You*, ‘our whole lives are for casting off the expectations of others and finding our true selves’, I think every experience will give us real-life experience, and as long as we use careful perception, they will become our solid life force”. Fizz, a seventeen-year-old Shanghai native, had just graduated from high school in the United States and was travelling on a gap year before college in a similar fashion to that of Miu and her friend: he knew he wanted to travel but where he would go next was still up in the air. Somewhat different from the self-fulfillment sought by the tourists in the first two examples, Fizz was searching for his roots, his place in larger Chinese society, by attempting to photograph each of China’s fifty-six officially recognized “nationalities”. The tourists I spoke with seem to be searching for self-fulfillment or



wholeness that they are unable to find in their daily lives, so they set out to find it in “other” lives and landscapes.

Thus, what I posit here is that the focus on self-reflection, self-fulfillment, and discovering one’s own place in the greater society are all factors that contribute to the construction of touristic modernity in Xizhou. Generally speaking, the “backpacker”-type tourists come to Xizhou because it is quieter, less commodified, and more scenic than large touristic centers such as Dali Old Town and the atmosphere is completely different from their experiences in daily life; however, they do not typically stay in the town for an extended period of time, which greatly limits the interactions with local people to only touristic, surface level engagement. Because of the very limited interaction with the community, tourists like those I have discussed inadvertently shape the local reality through the reinvention of Xizhou as a destination by sharing experiences and images on social media and in person based on what was related to their personal experience of self-fulfillment. Through images the tourists share, they have chosen to represent only the cultural aspects that they deem relevant, which paints a very specific picture of what Xizhou is like and that more tourists expect to see when they visit. Following the work of Edward Said ([1978] 1979), the tourists are carrying out the “othering” process, defining the arbitrary line of what separates their mainstream Chinese modernity from the lives of the people of Xizhou. Based on these perceptions, Xizhou becomes an “imagined geography”, invented by the experiences ideas of the tourist. Additionally, this search for a simpler, quieter, more “authentic” way of life has brought with it the demand for touristic goods and services in Xizhou, which has introduced new economic opportunities and has changed the local reality; the same paradoxical product of modernity that Dean MacCannell (1976) discusses.

## **The Linden Centre**

The Linden Centre is an American-operated boutique hotel in Xizhou, whose dual role as a touristic service provider as well as a center for heritage and cultural preservation makes it a large contributor to the construction of touristic modernity in the town. The hotel itself is located in a Bai-style courtyard home that once belonged to wealthy entrepreneur in the 1940s, which remained unharmed during the Cultural Revolution, and was converted to public property in the years after; eventually it was designated a national heritage site in 2001 (Zhao 2015, 109). Brian and Jeanee Linden, the two Americans who founded and run the Linden Centre, were initially unsuccessful in their attempt to buy the compound in 2004, but “four years later, after two years of negotiations with the township and municipal governments, the couple established the Linden Centre” (Zhao 2015, 109). The couple spent millions of RMB in careful restoration of the courtyard and even state on the hotel’s website that “in many ways, our hotels are living museums. Our restoration efforts have breathed life back into neglected heritage sites, giving these tangible cultural monuments dignified existences that are commensurate with their original architectural grandeur”; the Lindens stress that “while we have incorporated many comforts of an exclusive hotel, we have not sacrificed historical accuracy and atmosphere to only inject luxury” (Zhao 2015, 109; [www.linden-centre.com](http://www.linden-centre.com)). When I spoke with Mr. Linden during my time in Xizhou he said that he and his wife opened the Linden Centre because they wanted to give back to the country they had been visiting for the past thirty years by fostering cultural exchange between China and the West as well as by preserving and protecting traditional architecture and customs through sustainable tourism. When I asked why he chose Xizhou as the location of the Linden Centre, Mr. Linden answered that Xizhou has much history regarding

trade, as it was a stop along the Tea and Horse Caravan Road, and much of that history, culture, and architecture has remained untouched by the transforming force of domestic tourism.

In addition to the Linden Centre's main hotel, there are two additional locations that the Lindens have developed in Xizhou. The second location that the Lindens occupy is called *Yang Zhuoran*, which is located in the home of a merchant built in the 1930s and was renovated by the Lindens in 2013. *Yang Zhuoran* serves as an education facility where "schools are invited to work with the Linden Centre to design and carry out custom education programs"; currently, schools such as Washington D.C.'s Sidwell Friends School and the Shanghai American School have programs where students stay at this Linden Centre campus ([www.linden-centre.com](http://www.linden-centre.com)). The third location, called *Baochengfu* or Linden Commons, is the largest and most recently renovated of all three locations, having just opened for business this year. The Linden Commons, also a national heritage site, is an expansion of the hotel aspect of the Linden Centre, featuring larger rooms and common spaces, but the renovation and leasing of Linden Commons has been carried out differently than that of the original Linden Centre location. Whereas the Lindens funded and carried out much of the renovations themselves for the first compound and pay rent for the property, the renovation of Linden Commons was funded by a "local enterprise owned by the municipal government" and this enterprise and the Lindens will "share profits in lieu of rent" (Zhao 2015, 110). While the Lindens initially had to negotiate with the local government in order to establish the original hotel, as the success of the Linden Centre grew, so too did the local government's recognition of the benefits of working with the Linden Centre, "the model's economic returns, Brian Linden's positive image among locals, and the Linden Center's English and Chinese media coverage that brands Dali City" (Zhao 2015, 110).

The growing popularity among both international and domestic tourists as well as the expansion of the Linden Centre over the past eight years has also increasingly shaped the local reality of Xizhou ever since its establishment in the town through its involvement in the community. In an interview with Brian Linden, he told me that he has hired many local people to work at the three locations and hopes to grow his business model away from his personal story so the hotels will be even more focused on sharing Xizhou and the people who live there with the guests, implying that “sustainable” tourism will remain a fixture in Xizhou. Additionally, the Linden Centre encourages guests to interact with Xizhou’s “gregarious and curious villagers over activities such as calligraphy, tea and wine tasting, ceramics, photography and painting workshops, culinary classes, hiking, architecture tours, and traditional crafts”, activities that are facilitated by the hotel ([www.linden-centre.com](http://www.linden-centre.com)). For example, one of the standard walking tours the Linden Centre offers takes guests down alleyways away from the village center and into the more residential area of Xizhou in order to see “authentic” Bai-style architecture. Part of this tour involves a visit to the home of the Zhang family (a topic that will be revisited in the next section), which serves two purposes for the tour: firstly, the residential compound features antique ornate wall paintings, jade fixtures, and Bai-style woodwork; secondly, the Zhang family has been making *rushan*, a Bai specialty cheese, for generations and demonstrates the process to the guests as well as encourages them to try it out for themselves. In inviting local people to interact with guests and facilitating cultural exchange, Brian Linden explained to me that he believes he is helping to “inspire locals to take pride in their culture”, but this attitude is also shaping the local reality in that it encourages the performance of culture for the consumption of tourists.

Although the Linden Centre has helped to preserve Bai architecture and has encouraged local people to share their cultural knowledge, its increasingly involved partnership with the municipal government has also contributed to shaping the local reality as well as causing the Linden Centre to somewhat lose control of its original message. Given the fact that Brian Linden, an American, was able to open and run a hotel in an official Chinese national heritage site, something virtually unheard of before, clearly shows that he is able to play the “game” with the municipal government. It appears that Brian Linden was able to utilize the national discourse surrounding cultural and heritage preservation in China combined with the Western discourse of sustainable tourism to convince the municipal government to agree to the concept. However, the increasing interconnectedness of the relationship between the municipal government and the Linden Centre, as is seen in the example of Linden Commons, the Linden Centre is inadvertently contributing to the very type of tourism it tries to discourage. For example, during my interview with Brian Linden he mentioned that without his knowledge, some government entity began advertising the Linden Centre in Dali Airport as a way to attract tourists. Additionally, Yawei Zhao (2015, 110) writes that due to the “extended partnership” between the municipal government and the Linden Centre, “the municipal government now has plans to relocate occupants of other historic Bai houses and turn them into tourist sites”. Mr. Linden said in the interview, however, that renovation alone is not the key to his success and that entrepreneurs who only focus on this aspect will fail in their ventures because they are missing the message that the Linden Centre is founded upon. The Linden Centre has its own principles, but they are growing weaker in practice as the company expands.

This philosophy of cultural and heritage preservation employed by the Linden Centre is similar to Tim Oakes’ (1998) discussion of the “Far Village” project carried out in Guizhou in

the 1990s. Oakes (1998, 155) writes that international tourists often “express an interest not only in the preservation of authentic traditions, but in questions of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘empowerment’ for villagers”; these factors along with “international patterns of consumption” pushed an American clothing designer to start the “Far Village” project, the goal of which was to “foster economic development and empowerment for the village women [of rural Guizhou], while at the same time encouraging the preservation of their craft traditions in the face of modern social transformations”, by selling clothes featuring their designs to Japanese, European, and American markets. While the designer planned for the project to revolve around the women’s handmade designs and crafts going directly from the women to the market, ultimately the project “was being pasted onto the existing exploitative structure of commercial crafts production in Guizhou” and creative control of designs along with control of production moved out of the hands of the women and into the hands of factories that standardized the designs and process in the interest of increasing profit (1998, 156). The mission and development of the Linden Centre, along with its consequences, follow a similar narrative to that of the Far Village project. In addition to the growing appeal among Chinese domestic tourists, the Linden Centre continues to be marketed towards the culturally conscious Western traveller described by Oakes with the promise of “rural havens for deeper interaction with the Dali community and structured explorations of China’s past” and “a passage into an intellectually stimulating and visually stunning exploration of traditional China” ([www.linden-center.com](http://www.linden-center.com)). So in the same way that the Far Village Project represented “modern metropolitan need to preserve and fossilize the traditional customs of ‘ancient cultures,’ [and] showed that capital can be enlisted to support such an ideal”, so to does the Linden Centre through its capital, restored architecture and local culture.

Ultimately, the Lindens do have good intentions in their goals of cultural preservation and exchange, but their effort to create “sustainable” tourism in Xizhou is a double-edged sword. They are encouraging local people to participate in cultural exchange and “are able to provide stewardship, money, and expertise to supplement governmental efforts in heritage management by making [the Lindens’] opinions heard and accepted by the municipal government”; however, as collaboration with the municipal government increases, the Linden Centre acts somewhat as a spokesperson for the local people, which edges out local opinions. Although Brian Linden knows how to navigate and negotiate with the municipal government, clearly the government is still the dominant voice in terms of implementing touristic frameworks; essentially, the Linden Centre’s success and promotion of small-scale “sustainable” tourism is serving as a model for increased touristic development in Xizhou by entrepreneurs and the municipal government.

### **Local People of Xizhou**

Much previous scholarship regarding tourism focuses in large part on the study of the impacts tourism has had in a given place. Impact studies are valuable in that they provide in depth analyses of tourism in a particular time and place, but in doing so tend to represent the local people as passive objects, powerless in the face of commercialization and commodification brought on by tourism. To combat this notion, specifically in the context of China, Tim Oakes (1998) shows that shifting the focus of tourism research from studying impacts to studying the processes and actors behind tourism not only allows for a more holistic perspective but also gives more voice to actors such as local people whose actions and opinions have been largely underrepresented. In his research of tourism in rural Guizhou, Oakes (1998) introduces the concept of “modern subjectivity”, which sheds light on the assumption that local people passively accept the state discourse surrounding tourism and points out that there is much more

to the roles local people play in shaping their own reality and thus the construction of touristic modernity. “Modern subjectivity” refers to the local people’s ability to respond to how their local reality has been transformed by the state discourse of tourism, which the people do by reasserting their own authenticity through participation in tourism; in other words, “the state’s efforts at standardization and control are met with a certain degree of subversion”, which is “achieved via rhetorical manipulation of the state’s own discursive categories” (Oakes 1998, 225). By participating in the force of tourism that is shaping the local reality, the local people become active subjects, rather than passive objects, who are “appropriating and manipulating dominant representations” to their standards of what is “authentic” (Oakes 1998, 225). While the ability local people have to subvert the larger discourse may not be very powerful, in cultivating an “authentic” modern subjectivity the local people are able to maintain some sort of say in the construction of touristic modernity, which, as Tim Oakes (1998, 225) writes, is very important: “that any degree of subjectivity is present at all in Guizhou’s tourist villages should be testament enough to the necessity of keeping the Subject alive in our analyses of modernity and modernization”.

Because Xizhou is in such close proximity to the touristic center of Dali Old Town, the local people have seen firsthand the economic prosperity and physical transformations that tourism has brought with it and that has begun to find its way to the small lakeside town in recent years. Based on interviews with five local people, domestic tourism, both “backpacker” and packaged types, has increased dramatically over the past five years, undoubtedly as the Linden Centre grew more popular as its cooperation with the municipal government deepened and as other entrepreneurs found their way to the town. In the face of this increased tourism the local reality has begun to change, which has not gone unnoticed by the residents of Xizhou. Instead of



remaining passive objects as touristic modernity is constructed around them and watching as outside entrepreneurs and state-owned enterprises reap the benefits, many of the local people have demonstrated their own modern subjectivity through their active participation in the promotion of touristic goods and services. By selling souvenirs or turning ones home into a guesthouse, the residents of Xizhou are taking the national discourse of tourism, “appropriating and manipulating the dominant representations” to their own specifications of what is “authentic”, and producing it for touristic consumption (Oakes 1998, 225). In this way, the local people are contributing to the continued construction of touristic modernity, but on their own terms, which, although the effects may be marginal, subverts the larger state discourse of standardization in tourism.

While Xizhou is still very much an agricultural community, as tourism continues to increase many local people have begun to engage in touristic work in addition to the jobs they already have, while others are working in tourism full time. As more local people begin to work in tourism, the local reality is undoubtedly changing; however, it is also a demonstration of modern subjectivity. Take for example Ms. Mei, a Xizhou local of the Bai minority, who runs a souvenir shop with her family just outside the main square. When I spoke with Ms. Mei she told me that five years ago there were very few stores catered toward tourists in Xizhou but now the town seems to be changing every year due to the steady increase in tourism. Ms. Mei and her family opened their store about one year ago in response to the increase in tourism, and although they initially sold locally grown coffee, they soon switched to selling souvenirs inspired by Bai culture, especially blue and white tie-dye tapestries. I asked why Ms. Mei decided to start selling Bai souvenirs to which she responded that she and her family wanted to share Bai culture with the tourists who came to Xizhou. Clearly, Ms. Mei and her family are subjects rather than objects

in the construction of touristic modernity as their business is entirely built around tourism; however, in viewing the sale of Bai souvenirs as sharing their culture, they are reinterpreting and thus subverting the standardization and commodification of culture that is often a product of domestic tourism.

Similar to Ms. Mei, the Zhang family, whose home is part of a Linden Centre tour, also demonstrates modern subjectivity through the sale of souvenirs. As is previously mentioned, the Zhang family agreed to let the Linden Centre bring tours to their home to see their traditional cheese making methods in addition to the home's Bai-style architecture. A tour guide from the Linden Centre I spoke with told me that the Linden Centre was initially compensating the Zhang family with six hundred RMB a month and because of this the Zhang family did not need to do anything other than continue making and selling cheese to supplement their income; however, for reasons that are unclear, the Linden Centre stopped compensating the Zhang family but still continues to bring tours to their home. In order to make up for the loss of income, instead of negotiating with the Linden Centre, the Zhang family decided to begin selling souvenirs and encouraging groups of domestic tourists participating in packaged tours to visit their home as well. When I visited the Zhang family's home with a Linden Centre tour the whole courtyard was lined with table after table of souvenirs, but there was still one family member demonstrating how to make the cheese. While in the home I spoke with one of the family members, Ms. Zhang, and asked her why her family decided to start selling souvenirs. Ms. Zhang told me that originally they had only sold cheese, but decided to start selling souvenirs in addition as the number of tourists began to increase because they knew it would supplement the family's income. When faced with an unequal relationship with the Linden Centre, the Zhang family did not remain passive but instead manipulated the reputation that being a part of a

Linden Centre tour gave them in order to attract more tourists, which allowed the family to continue to benefit economically from tourism in addition to continuing their traditional cheese making.

Tim Oakes (1998, 224) writes, “the notion of subjectivaztion goes a long way in revealing the ways in which the experience of modernity is largely about reproducing the powers of the state and capital” and while the modern subjectivities of Ms. Mei and the Zhang family are more focused on reproducing the powers of capital, Mr. Li’s modern subjectivity is geared more towards reproducing the powers of state. Mr. Li, a commercial fisherman, lives in Shacun, a village adjacent to Xizhou Village that is known for its demonstration of traditional Bai cormorant fishing for tourists. When I spoke to Mr. Li about tourism in Xizhou he made a point of saying that he had worked at the cormorant fishing site for seven years and that it was a good way to supplement his income, especially during the past two years since he has been living on compensation from the government due to a moratorium on commercial fishing in Erhai because of overfishing. Mr. Li then said that in addition to the moratorium on commercial fishing, as of July 2015 the government banned all cormorant fishing tourist sites from operating supposedly for the sake of protecting the lake from pollution. In response to this Mr. Li and other employees of the tourist site went directly to the local government to find out the real reasons why cormorant fishing was banned but were given no answers beyond that it was to protect the lake. The sign directing tourists to the site still stands, so when the occasional tourist arrives, Mr. Li, who returns to take care of the birds, has to tell them that the site is closed. When the tourists ask why, all Mr. Li can do is smile and repeat what the government told him, that it is closed to protect the lake. Mr. Li is repeating exactly what the government has declared, but he is not passively accepting the message in doing so. He is reinterpreting what the government has told

him and manipulating it in a way that when he tells tourists, they know that there is more to what he has said than meets the eye.

Like Mr. Li, Mr. Yang, a Xizhou local, displays modern subjectivity through reproducing the powers of the state, but specifically appropriates the national discourse surrounding culture and heritage preservation through his connection with the Linden Centre. Mr. Yang can be described as a, “cultural broker”, someone who actively encourages and facilitates cultural exchange, through his many roles in Xizhou: running a Western-style café with his wife near the main square, organizing and leading bicycle tours around the area, and acting as the “cultural liaison” for the Sidwell Friends School when students stay at the Linden Centre. Through his multiple roles he is always looking for a way to promote cultural exchange through sustainable tourism. When I asked Mr. Yang about how tourism has developed in Xizhou he told me that there really was not much tourism until the municipal government recognized the Linden Centre as being marketable to domestic tourists, but because of this Xizhou is just becoming another stop on the lake tour that domestic tourists visit for a few hours at most. Like the Linden Centre’s ethos, Mr. Yang wants to inspire the people of his home to take pride in their culture and “build a bridge between travellers and the local culture” to ensure a future of sustainable tourism focused on the history, architecture, and cultures of Xizhou. Mr. Yang clearly supports what the Linden Centre has done for Xizhou in the past eight years and is actively taking part in tourism to get others to recognize its merits. Mr. Yang is reproducing the national discourse surrounding culture and heritage preservation, but reinterpreting its role in tourism in the same way that the Linden Centre does.

From these few examples of just a handful of the local people in Xizhou, it is very clear that they do play a role in the construction of touristic modernity in the town. Local people are

not passive objects only being affected by the force of tourism but instead are active subjects who can subvert the national discourse of tourism by manipulating it and reproducing it to fit into what they consider to be “authentic”, what Tim Oakes (1998) calls “modern subjectivity”. These individual accounts of modern subjectivity highlight the importance of identifying actors that shape touristic modernity in order to understand the full picture of how tourism is shaping a particular place.

### **Conclusion**

Tim Oakes’ (1998) concept of touristic modernity accurately describes how the Chinese national discourse surrounding tourism, as both a tool for economic growth and nation-building, has shaped what the local reality has become for many towns and villages in the peripheral regions of China, especially those with large populations of ethnic minorities. Specifically in the Dali Bai Autonomous Region, foreign tourism followed by nostalgia-fueled domestic tourism has transformed Dali into a commercialized tourist destination, which has begun to spill out to other towns around the lake such as Xizhou. Touristic modernity is not, however, a singular homogenous force that culturally and physically transforms a given location overnight; instead, the construction of touristic modernity is a process that involves multiple contributing actors. In Xizhou, where the construction of touristic modernity is in its beginning stages, three main actors who are contributing to this process can be identified: domestic tourists, the Linden Centre, and local people. Through the misplaced search for authentic experiences of self-reflection, young “backpacker”-type domestic tourists shape the local reality of Xizhou by representing it as an “imagined geography” based on their own often surface-level perceptions, and perpetuate their ideal Xizhou through images and text on social media. The Linden Centre, through the American owner’s skill in navigating the Chinese national discourse of cultural and heritage preservation

and the Western discourse of “sustainable” tourism, has been able to preserve architecture and culture, but increased cooperation with the municipal government has led the Linden Centre to become more a spokesperson for the local people and has caused an increase in “unsustainable” tourism to the town that it originally sought to discourage. Lastly, although the local people do not have a great deal of power in the decision-making processes of the course of tourism development, through Tim Oakes’ (1998) concept of modern subjectivity the local people are subjects rather than objects who have the ability to shape their own reality by reinterpreting, manipulating, and appropriating the national discourse surrounding tourism into something they feel represents their own “authenticity”. Because touristic development is in its initial stage, the future of tourism in Xizhou remains hanging in the balance, but studying the process of how different actors contribute to the construction of touristic modernity allows for a more holistic interpretation of how tourism could potentially develop and how the local reality would change.

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