ETHNICITY IN CHINA
Reviewing ethnicity in light of ethnic tourism in Southwest China

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ABSTRACTS

Ethnicity in China
Reviewing ethnicity in light of ethnic tourism in Southwest China

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Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Laurel Bossen
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This thesis reviews the anthropological approaches to the study of the ethnic minorities in Southwest China. It sets out to demonstrate the limitations engendered by studies focusing on the process of ethnicity and the relative absence of 'ordinary local peasants' (villagers not involved in the dialogue of ethnicity) in anthropological research of villages in Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan. Furthermore, this paper reveals the need for in-depth local studies in order to understand the impact of ethnic tourism on local identity construction.

La thèse présentée critique les approches anthropologiques sur l'étude des minorités ethniques du Sud-Ouest de la Chine. Elle relève les limites engendrées par les études qui se concentrent essentiellement sur le processus de l'ethnicité et souligne l'absence des «paysans locaux ordinaires» (villageois qui ne sont pas inclus dans le dialogue ethnique) des recherches anthropologiques des villages du Yunnan, Guizhou et Sichuan.
De plus, cette étude permet de reconnaître le besoin évident d'études locales plus approfondies qui permettraient de mieux saisir et comprendre l'impact du tourisme ethnique sur la conception de l'identité locale.

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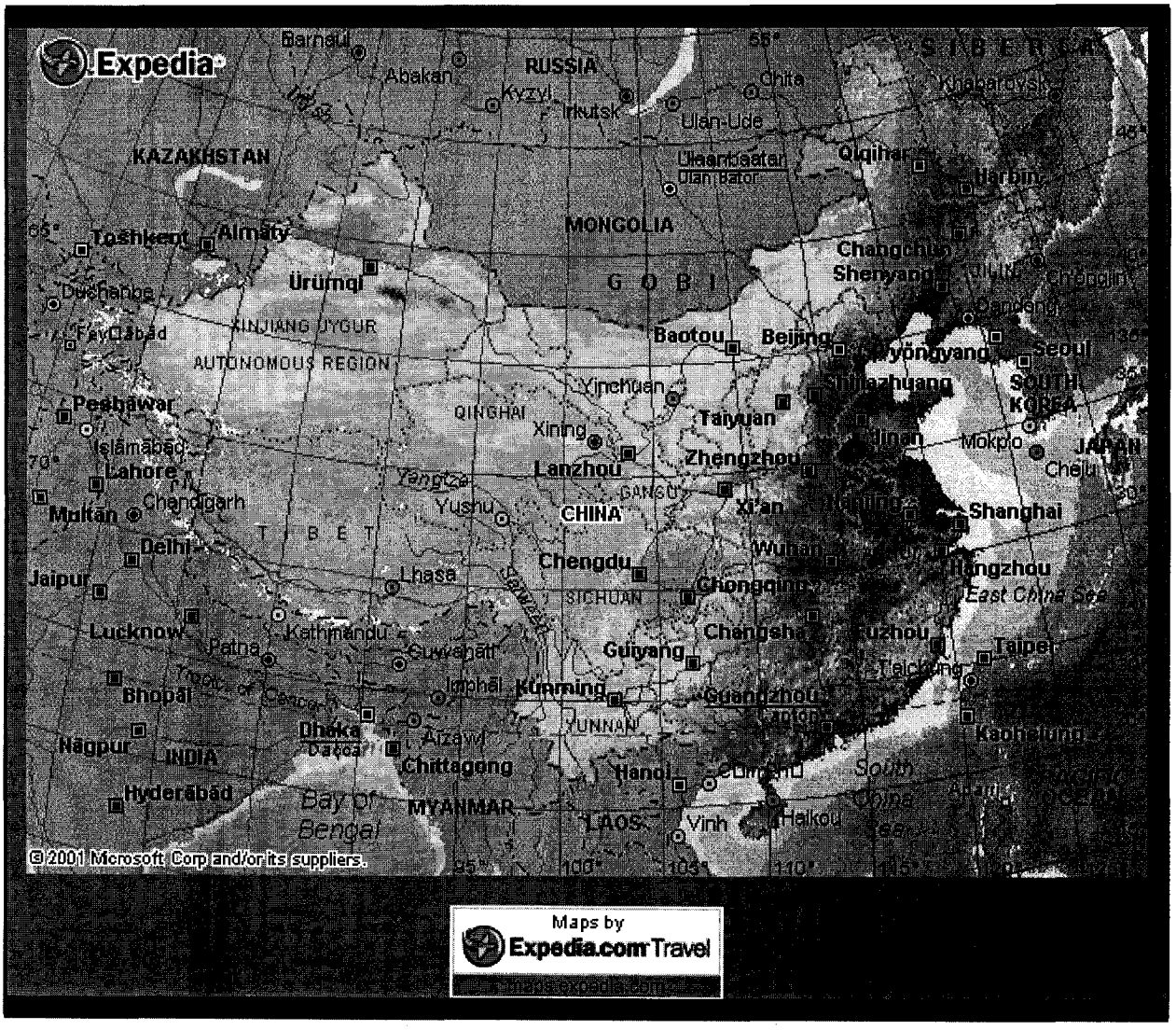
MAP OF CHINA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INTRODUCTION

During my first trip to China, my anthropological curiosity drove me to the far corner of southeast Guizhou. In the spring of 2000, I found myself sitting peacefully under a drum tower in a Dong village called Zhaoxing. It had taken me six days to reach the village from Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou. As I sat, I watched the villagers selling their vegetables, fruits and meats from tables set up along the main road. Other villagers were passing by, following their herd of water buffaloes, stopping once in a while to chat. I noticed long strips of indigo dyed cloth drying in the sun, as well as groups of women weaving together. I was puzzled because I had not seen these cloths being used, or worn.

The arrival of what appeared to be city men with their video cameras caught my attention as they started setting up equipment around a drum tower (a recognized architectural characteristic of the Dong). As the only foreigner around, I was cordially invited to attend what they called an ethnic performance. The city men told me they were making a documentary on Dong culture for the promotion of tourism in the region. I watched as the troupe arrived dressed in the indigo cloth I had seen and holding various musical instruments. The performers set up a table and offered a drink of rice wine to the city men and myself. This was followed by a performance combining dances and songs. The overall effect was very entertaining and colorful.

I noticed that other villagers had gathered around the drum tower, on the edge of the spectacle, most wearing what is usually called 'Mao clothes' (blue jacket, blue pants and the typical green rubber shoes worn by peasants). The city men who were filming took no notice and solely focused on the performance. This led me to wonder about Dong ethnicity and if it

had the same meaning for those filming, those performing and those sitting on the edge watching the show.

In this thesis, I am going to explore the potential impact of ethnic tourism on the local construction of ethnic identity. I suggest that ethnicity is constructed through a dialogue between an observers model of identity (construction of identity by outsiders – in this case the state, tourist industry and tourists themselves) and local (conscious) models of identity. However, I argue that in the ethnographies of minorities of Southwest China, local constructions of identity are neglected or subsumed by outsiders models. I question the importance of ethnicity in the construction of local identities.

For reasons of space and focus, this research concentrates on the ethnic minorities of Southwest China (Guizhou, Yunnan and Guangxi). Unlike regions of the Northwest and Tibet, these parts of China are less inclined to hold up religion as a marker of difference. Religion may be an important element of local ethnic identification, yet the classification of the minorities of Southwest China was done mainly on the basis of other characteristics. Furthermore, Southwest China is inhabited by a wide diversity of ethnic minorities and has been the target of numerous ethnographies pertaining to ethnicity.

In my analysis, I will draw upon various theories of ethnic identity which I will introduce in the first chapter. These range from primordial notions to the conceptions of ethnicity as a process. It will include a brief overview of the concept of ethnicity, both in academia and in popular discourses. Based on the work of Dreyer (1976) and Thoroval (1999), I will introduce the state and popular discourses of ethnicity in China, through different periods in Chinese history. I will give special attention to the grand scale

officialization of ethnic categories introduced by the Chinese Communist Party (from 1949 - on) and will consider its relative impact on scholarly research of peripheral people in China.

This thesis observes the relative absence of reference to the 'ordinary local villagers' in research undertaken in Southwest China and how approaches centered on the process of ethnicity have produced this lack. In order to do so, I will consider a sample of western ethnographies of the ethnic minorities of Southwest China. The authors' focus on the politics underlying ethnic identity formation and representation determines two types of observers models of identity: one based on the distinction Han/non-Han and another emerging from a dialogue with the state (including ideologies of modernity, and the promotion of tourism). Local (conscious) models of identity are mainly approached through interviews with villagers implicated directly in the dialogue (such as performers or minority elites). There are, however, some ethnographies (two of which I will present) that focus on place and in which ethnicity tends to be either peripheral or instrumental.

The potential impact of ethnic tourism on the local construction of identity will be explored in chapter three. Through local performances of ethnicity as the one I witnessed in Zhaoxing, the observers models of identity based on notions of ethnicity are increasingly represented and promoted at the local level. Drawing from the literature of tourism studies, I will define the specific view of ethnicity involved in ethnic tourism and the performances of ethnicity it triggers. I will argue a better understanding of the impact of ethnic tourism on the local construction of identity requires the study of local models of identity whether or not they relate to issues of ethnicity.

In most of the ethnographies on the minorities of Southwest China, mainly observers model of identity based on ethnicity are considered – in this case, the state, the tourist

industry, the tourists themselves, the minority elites and the educated urban population – however, little is found on the local (conscious) models of identity. Ethnicity may indeed not be central to local constructions of identity. I contend the study of ethnicity in China acts like the camera lens of the television men in Zhaoxing and does not consider those sitting on the edge of the performance. Indeed, this research will reveal that the meaning of ethnicity for the Chinese state, the educated people of Southwest China, the performers of tourism, and the minority elites is well documented. However, its importance locally, to the men following their herds or to the women weaving together, remains unclear.

CHAPTER ONE : THE CONTEXT OF ETHNICITY

This section aims to explore different approaches for understanding the meaning of 'ethnicity' in order to provide an introduction to an extensive subject matter, and to briefly demonstrate some of the larger currents the study and discourse of ethnicity has taken over the past 50 years. This will involve a brief survey of the academic debates that have surrounded the definition of 'ethnicity', how 'ethnicity' is perceived and approached in recent works, as well as some of the popular[1] views on ethnicity. The amount of work published on the matter (both scholarly and popular) is very large as the meaning of "ethnicity" is still unclear and evolving with history.

In order to situate the discussion, I will then introduce the subject of my study: the ethnic minorities of Southwest China and show how notions of nationalism, modernization and history are intertwined with the discourse of ethnicity in China. I furthermore will summarize the official ethnic classification project undertaken by the Chinese government as well as its often contradictory discourse towards its ethnic population. The impact of the political officialization of categories based on 'ethnicity' on scholarly research will also be briefly discussed.

Scholarly debates on ethnicity

According to Bendix and Roodenburg (2000: ix), the concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' have been under extensive scholarly inquiry since the 1960s. Whether it is the result of independence movements in Africa, the new geopolitics of the postcolonial states or the need for anthropologists to move beyond the study of small cultures as isolated units, the

concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' have evolved to encompass consideration of larger political and economic complexes including nation-states.

What constitutes an ethnic group is subject to intense debates within academia, leading to a spectrum of views ranging from notions of primordiality to notions of instrumentality. For primordialists, ethnicity has been perceived as natural, ascribed and as containing an unchanging core that persists through history (Bromley's concept of *ethnikos* cited in Banks, 1996: 18). This view has been implicitly linked to race and to kinship: ethnic groups being an extension of the family or close kin group (one is born into an ethnic group). Characteristics such as common language or dialects, religious beliefs, social and cultural customs, common origin (real or assumed) or shared territory may form the core of the group (Geertz, 1963 cited in Hutchinson and Smith eds., 1996: 42).

Comparatively, the instrumentalists interpret ethnicity as a tool that can be used to gain political power, recognition or even sovereignty (Cohen, 1969 in Ibid., 1996: 84). Although people may share certain characteristics, grouping does not result from these but rather from the perceived advantages of forming a group (Hechter, 1986 in Ibid., 1996: 92).

Fredrik Barth's influential work (1969) adds another dimension to studies of ethnicity by shifting the focus from the content of ethnic categories to the maintenance of its boundaries (a shift toward social processes introduced by Leach in 1954 in *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* cited in Verdery, 1993: 35). For Barth, ethnic distinction is more about boundary maintenance between groups of people rather than the specific traits attributed to a particular group (Barth 1969: 15). To mark boundaries of an ethnic group, an individual or the group may emphasize certain traits in interaction (1969: 14).

Barth has, according to Verdery (1993), contributed to three major shifts in the study

of ethnicity. First, ethnicity is to be studied as a form of social organization rather than as an attribute of 'specific cultures'. This implies a change from cultural content to 'dichotomization' and the study of behaviors that maintain group boundaries instead of 'objective cultural traits'. Accordingly, the study of ethnicity must consider its situational, and malleable characteristics, as well as a form of identity that is not constituted of fixed attributes (Verdery, 1993: 34-35). Ethnicity as such is thus mainly perceived as a dialogue of difference in which groups or individuals distinguish themselves from similarly constituted groups. Ethnicity is thus linked to a process (constantly 'in the making') rather than to a bounded unit and needs to be examined in its specific context (Rousseau, 1990: 45).

Popular discourses on ethnicity

Popular discourses found in the media and in political realms treat ethnicity as the categorizing basis of real, fundamental differences such as religion, culture, language, and the like. This perspective assumes a historical continuity and legitimacy to ethnic groups and has led to conflicts for sovereignty often resulting in violent wars or genocides[2]. Ethnic groups are constructed on the basis of a common core of values and behaviors that must be preserved and protected, whether it is language, religion, culture, shared history of suffering as a group, believed or real common ancestry, unique customs, architecture, and so on. Bendix and Roodenburg recently noted: "The assumption that ethnicity is a natural, innate, historically rooted and politically legitimating quality remains far more powerful in public discourse and consciousness than scholarly efforts to explain ethnicity, race and nation as discursive formations" (2000: xi).

Popular discourses tend much more toward a primordialist view of ethnicity allowing charismatic political leaders to use the notion as a tool for more power (recognition, self-government, independence, autonomy, etc.) and as a reason for war. Ethnicity is thus a powerful term that can trigger strong feelings and reactions. In addition, the perspective of ethnicity as natural, innate, and historically rooted underlies the promotion and success of ethnic tourism. Whether ethnicity is, or is not a primordial characteristic does not affect the fact that it may be perceived (imagined) as real, existing, and legitimate. As such, it can become real in its consequences[3].

Ethnicity in China

Although the term 'ethnicity' is used and applied to designate groups worldwide, the case of China offers some interesting peculiarities to scholarly research. The Chinese term *minzu* (民族) can equally denote nationality, people, the masses, ethnos or the nation[4]. More precisely, the character *min* (民) is defined as 'the people, the masses', while the character *zu* (族) indicates 'race, nationality'. Furthermore, ethnic groups in China or minority nationalities are called *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族)where *shaoshu* (少数) means 'a small number' or in other words, a minority or a small nationality/race. *Shaoshu minzu* (少数民族) has been translated by English-speaking scholars as national minorities, *minzu* groups, minority nationalities, ethnic minorities, and ethnic nationalities.

The term *shaoshu minzu* only recently (a little more than 50 years ago) came to designate ethnic nationalities in China. In fact, in Imperial China, those in the center of power defined the peripheral people as barbarous using characters imbued with negativism (i.e.: uncivilized, animal, wild), or denoting their geographical location in relation to the

center of power (barbarians of the north, south, east, and west: *Man, Yi, Jung* and *Ti*). The policies regarding these groups were mainly strategic, aimed at protecting the frontiers while controlling the minerals and forest resources their territory contained (Dreyer, 1976: 4-7).

In the early 1900s, Sun Yatsen acknowledged five ethnic categories: Manchurian, Tibetan, Mongolian, Tatar and Han. These were believed to be temporary distinctions in the process of becoming integrated into one common nationality/race.

> The name 'Republic of Five Nationalities' exists only because there exists a certain racial distinction that distorts the meaning of a single republic. We must facilitate the dying out of all names of individual peoples inhabiting China, i.e., Manchus, Tibetans, etc...we must satisfy the demands of all races and unite them in a single cultural and political whole (Sun Yatsen cited in Dreyer, 1976: 16).

The goal was indeed to integrate all groups through assimilation and create a unified 'republic' based on one race.

Chiang Kai-shek went one step further when, as head of the nationalist movement, he acknowledged the differences marking the population of China yet attributed diversity to religion and environmental conditions rather than to race. He believed and advocated the idea of one race, one people with common origin and blood.

The Communists, enthused by the Soviet model of minorities' policy and seeking to differentiate their approach from that of the nationalist movement, promoted respect for differences, the "drawing together" (1976: 91) of different groups for the march toward socialism. In order to know and respect differences, a large project of classification was launched for which many Chinese scholars were employed (including the famous anthropologist: Fei Hsiao-tung). Researchers were to grant minority status based on criteria

derived from Stalin's ideology. Stalin inspired by the work of Frederick Engels[5], elaborated an evolutionary scheme based on a theory of 'stages'[6]. The project was called *minzu shibie* (where *shibie* means to distinguish, discern[7]).

Ideally, groups had to be categorized according to four criteria established by Stalin: common language, territory, economy and psychological make up (Harrell, 1995: 33). In addition, each group was situated along an evolutionary continuum, thus associated with a particular stage of development. The Han, the majority group, represented the most advanced stage and other groups were classified according to their cultural distance from them. However, Stalin's ideology proved difficult to strictly follow, hence categories were often based on preconceived ideas held by the researchers involved in *minzu shibie*. "...It is clear from reading these retrospective accounts of the ethnic classification process that Stalin's criteria were not employed in any strict manner, but rather to confirm or legitimize distinctions for the most part already there in Chinese folk categories..." (Harrell, 1995: 66).

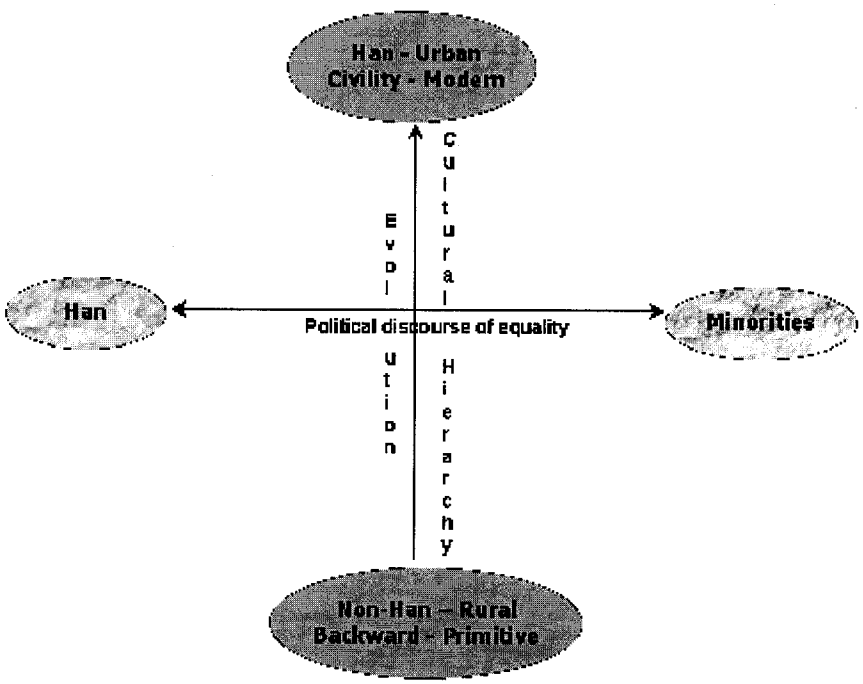
The ethnic classification process granted *minzu* status to 55 groups (56 if we include the Han) out of the 400 who had claimed a separate ethnicity (Shaw, 1989: 55). Thereafter, the goal of the Communist Party was to grant minorities equal and autonomous status, as stated in the first Constitution of the People's Republic in 1954 (Wu, 1989: 13).
Today, with a population of 1,295,330,000 people, approximately 8% are classified as *shaoshu minzu* while the remainder are considered Han[8].

The official discourse towards the minorities, continually shaped by and shaping popular perceptions, can be illustrated by two crossing axes. Borrowing from Thoroval (1999), there is a vertical axis, associated with evolution, on which at one end, stand the Han category as the more advanced and modern as opposed to the 'developing' ethnic

nationalities. This axis could also represent the different 'stages' suggested by Stalin and the popular perception of minorities as more backward and primitive[9]. These views, not restricted to minorities but also aimed at rural, remote areas (where most minorities reside), form the basis of development projects by the Chinese government[10]. Thoroval has called this vertical axis 'cultural', as it opposes the civility of the majority to the barbarism of the minorities. "*Un axe en quelque sorte vertical, que l'on peut qualifier de culturel au sens large, oppose la barbarie à la civilisation et à l'officialité, ou, ce qui revient au même, le non-Han au Han. Cette dimension est par essence hiérarchique*" (1999: 52)[11].

The second axis is horizontal and is meant to represent the official discourse of equality. It is according to Thoroval, political in nature. It promotes the integration of minorities as equal members of the Chinese nation-state and serves the discourse of nationalism[12].

The Chinese official/popular discourse toward Ethnic Nationalities



As the discourse of ethnicity became officialized by the Chinese Communist Party and as Chinese social scientists were recruited to give it legitimacy, the concept of ethnicity became increasingly an important component of studies on the peripheral regions of China. In ethnographies written prior to 1949, 'ethnicity' tended to be less central and less discussed. Francis Hsu's[13] well known ethnography of the town of Dali (Tali – he calls it West Town) in Northwest Yunnan is a good example. His field materials were collected between 1941 and 1943 and, in line with some anthropological studies of the time (Mead, 1928; Linton, 1945), aimed to explain the link between culture and personality. The main goal of his study is to explain the rise and fall of families in China as a cycle triggered by different types of personality. Hsu specifically focuses on the central role of ancestors in shaping village life and concentrates on individual personalities.

West Town is taken as an example of a 'generic' Chinese village, and the in-depth analysis and observations on personality configuration are intended to shed light on other areas of China (Hsu, 1948: 279). Hsu focuses more on the similarities West Town shares with the rest of China than on its uniqueness: "...whether West Towners are a mixture of Chinese and earlier inhabitants of the region or are a purer group of earlier inhabitants which has taken to Chinese culture is not important ...West Towners not only are Chinese in culture but also tend to insist that they are more Chinese in some respects than the Chinese in many other parts of China" (1948: 19, 20).

In his study, Hsu does not mention ethnic demarcation; he considers instead differences between rich and poor families and issues of social mobility. Hsu furthermore considers the West Towner to be representative of some cultural trends of China as a whole. Ethnicity is peripheral to his research yet "it is noteworthy that the people in the West Town

Francis Hsu made famous in this anthropological study (*Under the Ancestor's Shadow*) were in fact Bai, not Han" (Mackerras, 1994: 60). Comparatively, later studies pertaining to the region make ethnicity central to their analysis (see for example: He Liyi: 1993).

Summary

There are many dimensions to the concept of 'ethnicity'. The academic debates discuss the use of ethnicity as an analytical concept that can make sense of human groupings and social organization. Among scholars, ethnicity is perceived as a discursive formation, a process that can generate certain social realities. Alternatively, the popular and official discourses of ethnicity often involve nationalist goals. In these discourses ethnicity is portrayed as the basis of bounded units and is perceived both as a possible threat to national unity and as a useful heritage to legitimize the existence of the nation-state.

In China the categorization and classification of 'marginal' groups has always been part of the political project of forming and maintaining an empire and a 20th century nation-state. Because peripheral groups generally inhabit the terrestrial boundaries of China, it has been necessary for the center of power to find ways to incorporate minorities historically, politically, socially and economically.

Studies of peripheral peoples in China (now called *shaoshu minzu*) have taken two prevalent forms. Some have focused on legitimizing the official ethnic categories by treating them as cultural isolates[14]. "In China, this is an industry: 'ethnic studies' (Ch. *Minzuxue*) departments of universities and research institutes now churn out descriptions of every officially defined nationality, emphasizing the attributes that distinguish them from Han" (Mueggler, 2001: 19).

In such studies, ethnicity is considered through notions of primordiality rather than as a processual dialogue. This sort of literature, along with travelogs and guides, fuels the imagination and desire necessary for ethnic tourism. Such studies tend to keep local villagers enclosed in their respective ethnic categories.

Western scholars writing after the Communist Revolution (1949) have tended to focus on the 'process' of ethnicity. Such studies consider the discursive realm within which ethnicity is formed and tend to consider the contribution of minorities in the dialogue, acknowledging their agency and considering issues of identity formation and representation rather than simply considering them as 'exotic others'. A sample of studies discussing the diverse discursive fields and models surrounding the construction of ethnic identity will be discussed in the next chapter. Although these discussions and analyses point to the various processes involving ethnic minorities, they tend to put aside the importance of day-to-day local life and neglect the perspective of villagers not involved in discourses of ethnicity.

CHAPTER TWO: SAMPLE OF WESTERN SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE

In order to demonstrate the predominance of observers models of ethnicity in ethnographies of Southwest China and the importance of considering local (conscious) models, I will analyze a sample of post-revolution ethnographies and articles published in the West. I have selected this sample on the basis of the geographical location of the research (Southwest China); the selected studies have also often been cited and have made a significant contribution to the study of Chinese ethnic minorities; and lastly, these authors are considering issues related to ethnicity, identity, and ethnic tourism.

The observers models studied in the following ethnographies include the state, foreign missionaries, the tourist industry, the Han majority, and the ideology of modernity. I will first examine studies in which the state model of ethnic categorization (*minzu shibie*) is questioned and considered in light of a group's consciousness. These scholars focus on the ongoing dialogue between minorities and the state through which ethnicity comes into being, as a category.

I will furthermore examine studies focusing on the influence of ethnic tourism and on the role of ethnic minorities in shaping and manipulating representations of themselves in light of the discourse of modernization. Both these approaches attempt to acknowledge the agency of minorities in the dialogue, refuting the assumption that minorities are passive victims of state and tourism influence.

Scholars have also approached the study of minorities through the Han/non-Han distinction which fuels popular and official discourses. I will show such studies either

consider minorities to be in a process of assimilation or investigate the stereotypes and representations the majority makes of the minorities. Lastly, I will examine the approach promoted by village ethnographies (or ethnographies of place) as well as the differing results such studies yield.

The following section will demonstrate that ethnicity, in scholarly works published in the West, is mainly approached as a processual dialogue between outsiders' models and mostly educated or involved minorities. I will observe the absence of reference to the 'ordinary local villagers' and how approaches centered on the process of ethnicity have produced this lack. I furthermore will demonstrate that ethnographies of place (or village ethnographies) do not tend to extensively consider ethnicity unless there is ethnic tourism in the region. In addition, I will show how studies that primarily focus on ethnic tourism tend to consider more than one locality (multi-sited ethnographies) and hence, only include the local villagers involved in tourism (performances, representation, promotion, etc.).

This chapter is based on a sample of ethnographies and observes an inclination on the part of scholars to focus on ethnicity: an approach which, I will demonstrate, can be limiting.

The process of ethnicity as a dialogue with the state

Many ethnographies of Southwest China focus on refuting the state's categorization of ethnic nationalities by considering the gap between minority's ethnic consciousness and official ethnic categories. "If the civilizing center initiates and organizes a project by developing an ideology of definition and scaling, the peripheral peoples, those worked on as objects of the civilizing project, respond at least partially by developing an ideology of ethnicity or ethnic consciousness" (Harrell, 1995: 27). This approach studies the historical development of notions of ethnicity and ethnic consciousness in Southwest China and

perceives the processual dialogue between the state and the ethnic minorities to be the basis of ethnicity.

Charles McKhann focuses on the Naxi ethnic category and demonstrates the inappropriateness of the Communist project of ethnic classification (*minzu shibie*) according to Stalin's criteria (common territory, common economy, common language and common national culture (1995: 49-53). McKhann includes the minorities' own sense of distinctiveness and historical descent as opposed to the 'constructed history' that emerged from the Morganian[15] interpretations of the limited amount of available historical and ethnographic materials (1995: 60).

McKhann claims the government promotes policies toward minorities that are largely assimilationist (1995: 40). Ethnic categories were attributed (almost arbitrarily) in a top down process that resulted in, for example, the Mosuo being considered a branch of the Naxi[16]. The categories are placed on a scale based on the work of Engels and Marx, representing different types of "social formations", each thought to represent a different stage in an "universal" history of social evolution (1995: 41). As a result, he asserts, ethnic nationalities were tagged primitive, backward and in need of modernization.

McKhann cites Marx: "Men make their own history, but ... they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves" (1995: 61). According to McKhann, it is under certain historical circumstances (at a time China was affirming itself as a nation) that the ethnic nationalities were officially classified, and it is in this dialogue with the state that ethnic groups forged their ethnic consciousness.

Norma Diamond takes a similar approach. She focuses on the Miao as an ethnic category and shows the inappropriateness of Stalin's criteria used during the *minzu shibie*

project. She disproves each of the four criteria and also shows that the Miao category is constructed. She investigates the discourse of Chinese scholars and of the government that legitimize ethnic categorization at different times in history.

Diamond points to the gap between the representation of the Miao and the reality of being Miao. According to Diamond, although they are portrayed as being colorful and wealthy (always involved in dancing, singing, feasting, etc.), for the Miao: "being Miao means living in areas where schooling is often unavailable, being excluded from jobs in the modern sector (even when these do not require even basic literacy), and being controlled by state policies into which they have had little or no input " (1995: 114).

Such a gap, however, tends to bring people closer together, she states, raising ethnic consciousness. Similar to McKhann, Diamond sees ethnicity as primarily a group consciousness often triggered as a reaction to circumstances.

Stevan Harrell also believes that Yi as an ethnic group is a constructed category that has been legitimized through different histories written by diverse authors (Western missionaries and Western and Chinese scholars) for various purposes and under different historical circumstances (before or after the 1949 Communist Revolution). Harrell examines the perspective of those who have represented the Yi: "... this chapter is in a sense the history of those who have presumed to speak for the Yi " (1995: 67n4).

In constructing a Yi ethnic group, Catholic missionaries at the beginning of the century focused on the Yi's legends and cultural characteristics in tracing the origins of the people (1995: 70). Foreign scientists focused on racial differences, assuming the existence of a pure race, of correlation between inherited cultural characteristics and physical traits and, of the historical continuity of the Yi category (1995: 71). Chinese scholars before 1949

believed that deviation from the 'pure Yi' was a result of contact with the Han, while those after 1949 documented the integrity of the Yi category and its position on the scale of development as compared to the Han. The post-1949 works published in China are much more numerous than those written earlier and most share the goal of incorporating the minorities into 'a united multinational state' (1995: 79).

These different representations of the Yi and "in the name of" the Yi have, according to Harrell, affected the Yi's ethnic consciousness.

> Since 1956 the category Yi has come to exist not only in the minds of Han scholars and administrators, where it has always been, but also ... and increasingly in the minds of the various kinds of Yi, who learn their own history and culture not only through native ceremonies and recitations of genealogies ..., but also though the curriculum of the schools. They too have come to be Chinese, and as such their history has become part of Chinese history (1995: 91).

Different histories have at various times worked to legitimize or refute the legitimacy of the Yi category. In the process, according to Harrell, the Yi have acquired, used and reworked certain elements to position themselves within the Chinese nation and have developed a Yi ethnic consciousness[17]. However, how relevant this ethnic consciousness is in the daily life of local "Yi" villagers is not investigated.

Ralph Litzinger also focuses on the construction of history yet considers the Yao minority. He finds that writing *minzu* history, by both Yao and Chinese scholars, involves drawing a continuous line of descent from the past, taking the Yao category for reality and explaining its present in terms of stages of social development (1995: 135). The goal, in

accordance with the government's nationalist ideals, is to integrate the Yao into the larger history of China as well as involving them in the future of the country.

The resulting history, however, is often at odds with older oral histories still alive in the villages. Litzinger states that: "... for many Yao peasants these official histories make little immediate sense; they are probably rarely read and they certainly have not yet replaced the oral historical traditions that remain widespread in the majority of Yao villages" (1995: 139). Nevertheless, the 'official' history is known to local administrators, school teachers or educated Yao who return to their village and help the government with modernization projects. In this way, this version infiltrates villages providing the population with "... new imaginative contours of everyday life" (1995: 139).

Once again, it is through this process, a dialogue involving different agents (educated Yao, peasants, Western and Chinese scholars, as well as the Chinese government), that the Yao, according to Litzinger, acquire a sense of their ethnic uniqueness.

Margaret Swain furthers this discussion of the gap between the official categories and the minorities' ethnic consciousness. She discusses the process of ethnogenesis[18] which refers to the construction of ethnic identities from the mixing of new and old elements. She focuses on the new elements one Catholic missionary (Père Paul Vial) brought to the ethnic identity of the Gni-P'a Lolo (known today as the Sani Yi) and how these affected their self-definition and ethnic consciousness

French Catholic missionaries that came to China in the late nineteenth century to convert the Chinese population found the ethnic minorities more apt for conversion than the Han. This, according to Swain, is due to the inferior status the ethnic minorities had within Chinese society, which permitted the missions to be an ally against the Han. Since the

scheme introduced by the missionaries placed Europe (its grandeur exemplified by its religion) as the seat of civilization[19], those converting to Christianity were, regardless of ethnic identity, believed, according to Swain, to be attaining a higher status than non-believers.

Swain concludes that for the Sani Yi, Christianity, as it was introduced by Père Vial, may well be an important part of their ethnic identity. By introducing another scheme within which the minorities could better situate themselves, the missionaries provided an opportunity for a new self-definition. Swain shows the impact an observer's model can have on the local ethnic identity of converts.

Siu-woo Cheung similarly focuses on the impact of missionaries on ethnic identity in the early twentieth century, among the Hua Miao and the Hei Miao. His approach differs from Swain's in that he considers the socio-economic situation of a group as an important determinant of the success or failure of missions. Cheung asserts when a group is united in its situation (often one of oppression from a dominant group), the conversion process has more chance to trigger a local redefinition of the power structure and of being successful. He gives as example the Hua Miao, who, after conversion, "developed a strong social organization; they were equipped with writing and education, and were willing to assert their power to alleviate sociopolitical predicaments. The Han and the Yi found themselves confronted with a vigorous people who would no longer submit to (their) domination" (1995: 245). The Hei Miao, observes Cheung, were less united and more economically stratified, so the impact of the missions was considerably reduced.

According to Cheung, ethnicity emerges as a reaction to shared oppression (or low status) and is expressed when a group is given novel ways to interpret their social world and

better their social status (through, for example, the new power structure introduced by missionaries). Cheung and the other authors discussed above consider ethnic consciousness to emerge (or acquire visibility) in situations when a group is given the opportunity and the sense of power needed to assert ethnic boundaries.

The observers models seen in this section (Stalin's criteria, stages of social development, various (re)writing of history, processes of ethnogenesis and socio-economic status) converge to illustrate ethnicity as an ongoing dialogue between official definitions and categorizations, and the consciousness formulated and maintained by ethnic minorities. These studies show that ethnic minorities have taken part in the shaping of their ethnicity and have maintained an ethnic consciousness that may or may not conflict with the official version. These authors demonstrate successfully the assertion of ethnic boundaries through interaction with various models and forms of power. However, the importance and relevance of ethnic consciousness in local day-to-day interactions remain uncertain and my question of whether ethnicity is asserted between neighbors categorized differently is still unanswered.

The influence of ethnic tourism

Some recent ethnographies consider another influence in the dialogue shaping ethnicity: ethnic tourism. Tim Oakes (1998) studies the state discourse of modernization through development of tourism in the province of Guizhou. In attempting to demonstrate the agency ethnic minorities have in the development of tourism, Oakes redefines modernity in two parts. The state and people of Guizhou have a definition of modernity he qualifies 'false modernity' and defines as: "...the utopian, teleological modernity of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historicism, of the nation-state, and of the institutions of rationalism and scientific objectivity. It is this sense of modernity that people in Guizhou believe they are

pursuing, the industrialized West remains their most significant model for that pursuit" (1998: 7). The real modernity he calls 'authentic modernity' is: " ... a tense and paradoxical process through which people produce, confront, and negotiate a particular kind of socio-economic change " (1998: 7).

Tourism is, according to Oakes, the meeting point of these different concepts of modernity, where villagers of Guizhou present themselves to the tourists as 'primitive relics of the past' while manipulating and appropriating these representations, making them 'modern subjects' (1998: 7). Minorities thus construct a sense of ethnic identity through a dialogue involving the state, the tourists and the ideology of 'false modernity'. "This claim assumes an approach to ethnicity based not on cultural or primordial characteristics, but on ethnicity as a social construction conditioned by power relations, as mark of discrimination as well as a strategy of identity formation" (1998: 232n1).

Although the minorities of Guizhou are adopting a view of ethnicity that relegates their cultures to the past, they constantly manipulate representations made of them. For example, Oakes recounts when, in a Miao village, he was pressured by ethnic performers to dress as a Miao woman for the welcoming of 'his compatriots' (American tourists). "... it was their show, and I was their latest, most exotic prop for a ritual that had been repeated thousands of times for countless tour groups..." (1998: 1).

In order to demonstrate the agency ethnic minorities have over the ethnic representations made of them, Oakes considers villagers involved in tourism. He views ethnicity as continually constructed and as a 'modern' process of subjectivity. In this light, to Oakes, ethnic consciousness provides villagers with means to deal with the socio-economic change introduced by tourism.

In a very similar manner, Louisa Schein (2000) considers the interplay of modernity[20], tourism and ethnic identity as well as the involvement of the minorities in these processes. Beside taking into account issues of gender, she also specifically focuses on the role of discourse and performance in ethnic tourism. Her research is centered on the Miao, an officially recognized ethnic group geographically spread across Southwest China.

Schein also questions the Miao official category and overviews the Chinese discourse on the Miao historically. She surveys, in the work of western and Chinese scholars, missionaries, travel accounts, as well as Chinese classics and official histories, the negative connotations associated with the ethnonyms used to designate the Miao. She describes the representations that were and are made of the Miao and the many stereotypes used to portray them: "...how the cultural content of the Miao category has been variously filled, both by those who generalize about the whole group and by those who work with its tremendous internal variation" (2000: 51).

In reviewing the various discourses representing and defining the Miao, she reveals the way stereotypes, images and discourses are manipulated by the minorities involved in ethnic tourism. Like Oakes, she acknowledges the agency minorities have in the development of tourism in their regions, the various images of modernity held by villagers involved in tourism, the way they perform ethnicity as Miao and their agency in adapting, reproducing and manipulating images of themselves.

To come to these conclusions, Schein moves across a large terrain using a methodology called 'itinerant ethnography'. She moves back and forth between Miao practices, Chinese categorizations, images of modernity, tourists' fascination toward local

customs, their representation in travel literature and advertisement, as well as discourses of the state and of the elite minorities.

The different approaches of ethnic tourism discussed above all focus on process, practice, and change when approaching the issue of ethnic nationalities of China. These ethnographies provide insight into the observers' models shaping the minorities' sense of self: the images, discourses, and histories involved in the dialogue of ethnicity. Furthermore, these works acknowledge a wide array of influence and shed light on the manner by which the state (now and historically), in a dialogue with the minorities, instills a sense of self that is partly shaped by ideologies of modernity, of national unity, of difference and of the past. Ethnicity, as modern subjectivity, as a category imposed on the minorities, as means to adapt to change and as a social construction is central to these analyses.

However, as Walsh notes, different villagers "are differently positioned to affect and be affected by that identity process" (2001: 99). Unfortunately, this means that to demonstrate agency, one often ignores those who have none.

Ethnicity in the light of Han/non-Han relations, majority/minority approach

The process or dialogue of ethnicity has also been approached through the relation of the ethnic minorities with the Han. Since, as we have seen, the ethnic minorities are only 8 % of the population[21], there is a dynamic of majority/minority underlying government policies as well as social life.

Berlie argues that ethnic minorities are in a process of economic and cultural assimilation by the Han majority (a process he calls "*sinisation*" or sinicization). He sees the contact Han/non-Han as primarily a majority/minority issue where the former encompasses,

integrates, acculturates and transforms the latter. The five criteria of ethnic identity Berlie identifies as: language, social and political indigenous institutions/organization, religion and techno-economic relations (1998: 205) are, accordingly, slowly being transformed by the Han. The dialogue with the state, analyzed by some of the above authors as the basis of ethnicity (and ethnic consciousness), is perceived by Berlie to be a form of "Chinese acculturation" (1998: 23).

Much sinicization is in education, according to Berlie, through the official focus on diffusing *putonghua* (the official language of China, others are considered dialects) and promoting *tuanjie* (unity[22]) (1998: 194). Berlie sees the educated minorities who teach as promoters of state policies (compared to Litzinger who considers them as providing new ways to define 'the contours of everyday life' (1995: 139)).

It is increasingly through the language of modernization that sinicization takes place and by looking at the process of sinicization, Berlie states he is in fact elucidating the state's policies on Chinese culture, *wenhua*, amongst the minorities (1998: 207). He focuses on the assimilation process of the minorities within the Chinese nation-state and the different routes such an 'homogenization of differences' takes (1998: 240). The ethnic perspective that Berlie emphasizes is that of the government, its policies and those involved in the application and study of such policies; it is based on the dichotomy and relation between the Han and the non-Han.

Susan Blum (2001) also approaches the issue of ethnicity through the Han/non-Han dichotomy. She outlines the way ethnic groups are perceived and ordered by the educated, urban Han youth of Kunming in the province of Yunnan. Her research is based on interviews with college students and officials; on the analysis of essays written by students

(on their perspectives of different minorities, their experiences with minorities and their thoughts as to how minorities perceive the Han majority); she also looks at portrayals in the press, she observes various classroom settings, attends ethnic performances, considers policies toward minorities and surveys some Chinese scholarly writing. Her approach is centered on the Han's perception of seven minorities in Yunnan: Dai ,Wa, Zang, Hui, Naxi, Yi, and Bai *minzu*.

According to Blum, the Han have a 'mental scaling' by which some groups are much more salient in discourses than others. These ethnic groups are often salient not because of their size and number of members, but because they represent "typical minority qualities" (2001: 92). "Popular views of ethnicity focus on certain traits believed to be possessed by minority groups: primitiveness, dirtiness, backwardness, honesty, colorful clothing, exotic food, festivals and so forth. Those groups that are particularly good fits with these cognitive models are the groups that are salient – that is, mentioned frequently in a wide variety of contexts" (2001: 99). Accordingly, Blum considers Han stereotypes of the Dai as the 'fetichized ethnic other', the Wa and the Zang as the 'resistant, disliked ethnic other', the Naxi and the Yi as the 'colorful, harmless ethnic others' and the Bai as 'almost us' (2001: ix).

To obtain most of her data, Blum uses a test she calls a 'linguistic identification and evaluation task' consisting of asking respondents to listen to a recording of people speaking sixteen different varieties of *putonghua* (the official language of China spoken with varying local pronunciations) and asking them to: "...identify the variety of language; the degree to which it was *biaozhun* (standard); the place of origin of the speaker; the speaker's level of education, ethnic identity, job category, wealth, and suitability as a friend; and a vague category – *zheige ren bucuo ma?* (Is this person okay?) – trying to get at the overall decency

of the person" (2001: 41). This test provides her with data on the various assumptions the Han hold about different ethnic groups.

Blum concludes from her research that the Han attribute characteristics to minorities that often contrast with the characteristics they attribute to themselves. This permits them to mark the boundaries of the large, heterogeneous, geographically spread out Han category. Blum also shows the Han focus on modernization and on the way differences that do not hinder economic and cultural development are welcomed and even desired (clothing and secular festivals for example), while those that inhibit such changes are perceived as irrational and backward (such as wasting time worshipping and refusing to eat pork, 2001: 177). This hints at the Han's quest for modernity.

Blum depicts the perspective of a sample of the Han majority and demonstrates her informants consider ethnicity as traits that differentiate one group from another. Her focus is on the Han as an 'unmarked' majority category (2001: 176)[23] that differentiates itself from the 'ethnic other'.

Both Berlie and Blum draw upon an elite perspective (government, college students and officials, etc.) and though their conclusions demonstrate the dynamics of the Han/non-Han differentiation in Southwest China (minorities being assimilated and the Han defining themselves through opposition), they do not provide insight into the actual relationship locals may hold despite their categorization[24].

Village ethnographies or ethnographies of place

However, researchers have taken a different approach whereby they spend an extended period of time in one location from which they attempt to understand the many forces shaping the everyday life of its inhabitants. Place is taken into account as an important

dimension[25], not merely as: "a container for social being or a surface on which social life is played out" (Mueggler, 2001: 10). Instead, place is perceived as embedded with meaning and offering residents a way of making sense of the world that surrounds them.

Village ethnographies take a specific locality as a starting point and consider that "... present-day "minority nationalities" are neither outside a cohesive entity called "Chinese culture" nor in any simple process of being assimilated by it. Instead, these people seed a diverse cultural field with fresh influences; they selectively appropriate its elements, reworking or embellishing them; they imagine coherent versions of it against which to pose self-consciously, inventing themselves as different" (2001: 19). As the groups/communities studied are considered part of the Chinese nation, which in itself is increasingly considered as an 'imagined'[26] entity comprising diversity, these forms of ethnographies contribute to an understanding of China at large.

Erik Mueggler's ethnography is the study of a local community called Zhizuo located in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Region in Yunnan near the border with Sichuan (2001: 14). His analysis "is not limited to exploring "ethnicity" or to investigating practices assumed to be interesting because they are distinct" (Mueggler, 2001 : 20). Mueggler tries instead to elucidate how stories of the past help people assess the present. He reviews an approximate period of 50 years through which the Zhizuo locality was affected by various state policies ranging from collectivization, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the more recent Birth Planning policies. It is a period marked by the fall of the Ts'ici system (a local organizational system that held the community together in the face of outside forces, officials and spirits) and by the increased presence of the state and its policies in the everyday life of the community.

The community[27] Mueggler studies is "inhabited mainly by "minority people", officially of the Yi nationality" (2001: 1). Most residents, influenced by the discourse of minority nationality at the time of Mueggler's fieldwork, claimed to be Lòlop'ò,[28] using the Ts'ici system as a proof of their uniqueness (2001: 14). Nevertheless, according to Mueggler, "Lòlop'ò in Zhizuo see themselves as no less "Chinese" than any of their neighbors, yet they also believe themselves to occupy a unique and troubled place within the Chinese nation" (2001: 19). In Mueggler's investigation, the community is not marked as standing out from others on the basis of ethnic differences but is taken as part of a larger whole that comprises diversity. Zhizuo is actively involved in shaping China and is not merely submitted to its policies.

Although the inhabitants of Zhizuo, under the pressure of the present generalized official discourse of ethnic nationalities, may claim a distinct ethnic title (Lòlop'ò), Mueggler mainly treats the way a locality deals with change. He takes, as a unit of analysis, a local space comprising 24 villages (see endnote 27) and considers the residents not on the basis of ethnic uniqueness but as full members of the Chinese nation with some villagers involved in inflicting state policies[29].

As a result, Mueggler, although acknowledging the presence of ethnic categories, does not make ethnicity the focus of his research. His approach provides an ethnography of place not as a cultural isolate, but as a space infused by and infusing different forces in the whole of the Chinese nation.

Eileen R. Walsh (2001) also provides a village ethnography but focuses on the impact of ethnic tourism on village life. Walsh's unit of analysis is the village of Lakeside located on the shore of Lu Gu Lake in Yongning Township, Yunnan province, and is extensively

involved in ethnic tourism[30]. Walsh notes that the village is a tourist attraction for two main reasons. Domestic as well as international tourists come to Lakeside to observe the 'last matriarchy' and to experience the custom of 'walking marriages'[31]. Both characteristics are associated with the Mosuo who are officially categorized as a subcategory to the Naxi (an ethnic group mainly living in the northwestern part of Yunnan).

However, the village is inhabited by more than 40% Mosuo, more than 40% Pumi and 15% Han. The three ethnic groups are equally involved in the tourist industry as "each household contributes one member to the activities" (Walsh, 2001: 102). Regardless of their ethnicity, the performers are all required to wear the traditional Mosuo clothes. Thus, this 'Mosuo village' is in fact a place where the Mosuo do not comprise the majority of the population. Interestingly, she observes, the Pumi are an official category yet apart for their language, they describe themselves to be 'the same' as Mosuo (2001: 122n12).

Her focus is not solely on ethnicity per se, but on the impact of tourists bringing their expectations and models of ethnic uniqueness to the everyday lives of the villagers of Lakeside. By introducing the element of tourism, ethnicity is seen as a site of dialogue (often contradictory and paradoxical) on identity. Through tourist encounters, the villagers[32] represent themselves via images often shaped far from the Lakeside locality. "Within Lakeside, ethnic identity is one of the main lures used to attract and entertain tourists. The Mosuo identity there has been forged from the raw materials of daily life and interactions with other Mosuo, as well as those provided by decades of encounters with outsider accounts of the Mosuo, in addition to actual encounters with outsiders" (2001: 95).

Walsh considers tourism through the dichotomy modernity/tradition,[33] and shows the interplay involved between the local quest for modernity and the display of images of the

past to tourists. Ethnicity is indeed often linked to an 'imagined' past, as opposed to the 'modern' tourists. "Lakeside and the Mosuo, as have other ethnic peoples and places in China (Hyde 1999; Oakes 1998; Schein 1997), act as a site of desire. Within the frame of tourism at Lakeside, Chinese and other tourists look for a mirror into the past in which they can see alternatives to the "modern" lifestyles that they, the tourists, are living" (2001: 103).

Walsh notes that one of the way for the Mosuo to separate stage and backstage life locally is through the use of minorities' dialects where villagers can discuss among themselves some of the issues they face, especially those that tend to contradict the image they present to tourists.

These studies of Zhizuo and Lakeside, give us a glimpse of the everyday life and the reality of different localities in China. The authors' extended stay in one place provides them with an in-depth knowledge of local culture, not as cultural isolates but as deeply implicated in forces shared with the rest of the nation. These authors have attempted to grasp the locals' perspectives and this has not led them to consider ethnicity as central. When differences from the rest of China are discussed or mentioned, language,[34] religion, as well as certain customs (such as the Ts'ici system, matriarchy and walking marriages) are introduced as markers of difference. However, at the local level, these specific characteristics are mainly emphasized in interaction with outsiders (tourists or the state) and represent only part of local identity.

Conclusions

The local study by Francis Hsu (1948) introduced in chapter one shows that prior to the Communist revolution ethnicity was not systematically part of research in Southwest

China and that: "... for all these decades, Hsu and his readers have been content to consider the Bai exemplars of "Chineseness"" (Blum, 2001: 166). After decades of post-revolutionary research focusing on ethnic issues, Mueggler's recent study raises questions as to the importance attributed locally to the official ethnic classification. By overlooking the notions of ethnic categories and ethnic uniqueness in most of his book, Mueggler hopes to dismantle the idea of a "Chinese culture" as different and separate from minorities cultures. He moves beyond official categories as the basis of studying ethnic groups in China which, he states, permits him to conceive minorities as part of the Chinese nation, not in opposition to it

His approach, consciously moving away from issues of ethnicity, ethnic classification and ethnic agency, puts forth the possibility that ethnicity does not matter as much to local people as it does to scholars.

> We as a profession have become deeply concerned with identifying, categorizing and imagining ethnic others. Why? We have raised our consciousness of ethnicity to such a degree that when confronted by people who pay little attention to it, we may nod our heads knowingly to each other, implying that they are simply unconscious of a category we know to be significant. Or, we may prod them to come up with some "differences" which they had not previously seen as significant (Bossen, 2002: 10).

For many studies of Southwest China, ethnicity has been a focus of research. At the basis of the approach is the polarized notion of Han/non-Han (found in the official and popular discourse of ethnicity in China). Berlie points to the assimilation of the minority by the majority, while Oakes and Schein demonstrate the agency certain members of ethnic minorities have in different processes involving them and the state (rejecting the idea of ethnic minorities as being passive victims). These studies, however, are mainly based on

interviews with individuals involved in processes and discourses of the representation of ethnicity and as a result, tend to consider mostly minority elites. The ethnic minorities are, in the official and popular discourses, dichotomized from the Han in terms of modernization: they are represented as backward and in need of development. The work of most of the authors considering the issues of ethnicity try to dispute the inferiority attributed to the minorities yet do not question the dichotomy[35] it is based on.

Specifically focusing on issues of ethnicity often results in raising a certain 'ethnic' consciousness among the informants of these researchers (as may be the case for Harrell, Swain, Litzinger, Cheung, McKhann and Diamond's studies[36]). Indeed, the Lòlop'ò discussed by Mueggler refer to themselves as Yi when talking to outsiders (2001: 14) and will provide a curious foreigner inquiring about ethnicity, all the cultural symbols that are associated with the Yi ethnic category. Ethnicity as such, can thus be seen as a form of vocabulary used to present differences to outsiders.

This critique is not intended to completely discredit studies of ethnicity in China but instead to note that ethnicity may be inconclusive and restraining as an approach to understand the many issues faced by local people in China today. Although, as I noted in Chapter One, ethnicity is a term that permits the consideration of larger political and economic complexes including nation-states, its study as a process or as a dialogue neglects the local. The fact that villagers are economically, politically and culturally integrated into a state and wider, more global, processes is undeniable. Yet, "... that integration is not determinant of local strategies of social survival even if it sets the limits of their viability" (Ekholm-Friedman & Friedman, 1995: 165-6).

The shift introduced by Barth to the study of ethnicity: 1) ethnicity as a form of social organization, 2) ethnicity as dichotomization and maintenance of boundaries and 3) the manipulation and situational characteristic of ethnicity as a form of identity, has certainly infused studies of China. It has led scholars to focus on the process of ethnicity as a dialogue with the state which officially made ethnicity a form of social organization. Scholars have also focused on the dichotomy between the Han/non-Han and have studied the minority groups' manipulation of ethnicity as a possible source of identity. Ethnic tourism based on ethnic distinctions has furthermore been considered the meeting point between the assertion of ethnic boundaries and the manipulation of ethnic representations.

Approaches that consider ethnicity through the official ethnic categories, whether it is to dispute them, to denounce assimilation or demonstrate agency, tend to be restricted by a dichotomous frame of analysis (Han/non-Han, majority/minority). As a result, other areas of social interaction, change and sources of identity may be neglected. "There may be ethnic categories, but they do not form groups in a sociological sense. Neither should we assume a priori that the existence of ethnic categories is linked in a specific way with ethnic identity" (Rousseau, 1990: 46).

The authors who discuss ethnicity as a process have all contributed to a better understanding of the discursive field within which the state categorized groups in terms of ethnicity (*minzu*) and the participation of minorities in the dialogue up to this day. Most minorities are ethnically aware and will employ ethnic categories in their description of selves to others. However, these ethnic categories may not reflect the existence of a group that protects its boundaries by means of inclusion/exclusion. As Walsh (2001) showed, the

Mosuo form an ethnic group (although classified as a branch of the Naxi) yet both Han and Pumi can and do dress as Mosuo and present themselves as Mosuo to outsiders.

If ethnicity is considered as a vocabulary of differences presented to outsiders, it nevertheless is not entirely constructed or imagined. The consciousness of a category of ethnicity brought to villagers by tourism can have a real effect on local life.

CHAPTER THREE : ETHNIC TOURISM

Ethnicity, as a concept that defines human grouping, has been approached as a primordial quality, as a tool used in social relations and as a boundary differentiating neighboring groups. It has been analyzed by scholars as a discourse of difference, a dialogue between observers' models and local ethnic consciousness.

This chapter defines ethnic tourism and the view of ethnicity it entails. It considers the tendency by scholars of tourism to differentiate between staged and backstage ethnicity, a distinction associated with notions of authenticity.

Ethnic tourism may be in part responsible for the importation of the concept of ethnicity at the local level as a recognized vocabulary of difference. Yet the real significance of ethnicity to the everyday life of the villagers of Southwest China remains somewhat unknown.

Ethnic Tourism Defined

The definition of tourism and its many forms (eco-tourism, ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, mass tourism, sex tourism, adventure tourism, et cetera) has generated much debate among scholars. My focus is on ethnic tourism which differs from other forms of tourism mainly by implicating the local, not only to serve the tourist but as part of the tourist experience. Indeed, in ethnic tourism, note van den Berghe and Keyes, the locals are part of the show, they are "a living spectacle to be scrutinized, photographed, tape recorded, and interacted with in some particular ways" (1984: 345). Ethnic tourism has furthermore been defined by Cohen as: "(1) a variety of "site-seeing" tourism that (2) targets groups that do not fully belong, culturally, socially, or politically to the majority (national) population of the

state within whose boundaries they live and that are (3) touristically "marked", owing to their alleged ecological boundedness (Wood, 1997: 6) or cultural distinctiveness, uniqueness, or "otherness"" (Cohen, 2001: 27-28).

What marks cultures as unique for ethnic tourism tends to be "the lifestyles and artifacts of subnational ethnic groups – which are often considered 'backward' by the dominant ethnic majority " (Wood, 1997: 6). Consequently, most groups targeted for ethnic tourism are somewhat marginalized and peripheral to the national majority (Cohen, 2001: 28) or at least must be perceived as such.

The case of China

These definitions identify the groups targeted for ethnic tourism according to the popular and official (state) discourses. In the case of China, I have shown in the first chapter that *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族) are portrayed as representatives of a past stage. Ethnic tourism allows them, according to the official discourse, to retain their unique ethnicity while modernizing. It is a way for the Chinese state to reconcile ideals of a Chinese nationalism with ethnic diversity. "... A natural affinity exists between the nation-state and tourism in terms of a shared interest in presenting a place as unique and distinctive. Because of this affinity, the state's interest in tourism is as much political as economic" (Wood, 1997: 6).

Ethnic minorities represent the history of China and allow the country to market itself for ethnic tourism as a unique place. Accordingly, only specific characteristics of the *shaoshu minzu* are emphasized for ethnic tourism. These are mainly outward expressions of ethnicity such as costumes, dances, songs, architecture, and particular customs. The 'cultural stuff' pushed aside by Barth constitutes ethnicity in the popular and official discourses, and is also the focus of ethnic studies (*minzuxue*) in China. Within these multiple dynamics, the

ethnic minorities of Southwest China are defined and live. They have been classified by the Chinese state as *shaoshu minzu* and they are, as a result, placed in popular discourses in an inferior position to the Han, which in turn makes them targets of ethnic tourism presented to them as a way to develop and modernize.

The Paradox of Ethnic Tourism

Ethnic tourism can thus be characterized as paradoxical: it demands minorities to be 'relics of the past' in order to modernize.

> *D'une part, il leur incombe de vendre*
> *Auprès d'une clientèle de touristes,*
> *Un pays qui se situe dans un espace temps décalé*
> *Une sorte de musée ethnologiste plein de gens folkloriques*
> *D'autre part ils doivent vendre le tourisme auprès de populations d'acceuil*
> *Comme outil de modernisation et de développement économique*
> *Le tourisme qui modernise finira par éliminer le folklore*
> *Et l'on voudrait pourtant maintenir ces gens dans leur folklore*
> *Je n'ai pas de solutions à tout cela.*
> *(Thodiyal Suresh, cited in Clastres, 1998 : 73)*[37]

In order to discuss this paradox, some researchers of ethnic tourism have differentiated between 'real' and 'false' ethnicity. According to van den Berghe and Keyes: "ethnic tourism brings with it the special problem of authenticity" (1984: 345). This issue, introduced by MacCannell (1976), is linked to the idea that tourism is a product of modernity, seen as an homogenizing force that produces inauthenticity[38]. As a result, according to MacCannell, the tourist goes on a quest for authenticity which can be defined as a form of social life organized around face to face interaction rather than mediated by images (1976:

92). However, in the case of ethnic tourism, the very presence of tourists makes interaction increasingly based on images and stereotypes leading van den Berghe to assert: "... therein lies the great irony of ethnic tourism: it is self-destroying" (1994: 9).

Studies by these authors (MacCannell, 1976, 1984; van den Berghe, 1994; van den Berghe and Keyes, 1984; and Graburn, 1984) have thus tended toward differentiating staged from backstage ethnicity, the former being seen as reconstructed, re-created, secondary, fictional and inauthentic. This distinction permits the marketing, commodifying and selling of ethnicity as an object. "Reconstructed ethnicity is fully dependent on earlier stages in the construction of ethnicity. But it represents an end to the dialogue, a final freezing of ethnic imagery which is both artificial and deterministic" (MacCannell, 1984: 385).

According to these authors, ethnicity is a sense of shared descent represented by selected cultural markers. Through ethnic tourism these markers are restored, preserved, re-created and are reflected upon. However, the main focus of these authors is the phenomenon of tourism. Hence, their approaches note the way elements of culture are displayed, commodified and sold as well as how it is generally thought that, as a result, these elements lose their authenticity. Indeed, these researchers (MacCannell, Keyes, van den Berghe, and Graburn) differentiate between the everyday life ethnicity and the ethnicity that is presented. Unfortunately, the way these two dimensions may interact, overlap and influence each other, thus triggering change, is not comprehensively investigated. In other words, the dichotomy onstage and backstage is noted yet not extensively explored.

> But studies of tourism and ethnicity also suggests that the marketing of ethnicity to tourists tends to make people self-conscious and reflexive about the "cultural stuff," which, before, they may have taken more or less for granted. ... In addition, the very

> act of objectifying and externalizing ethnic culture makes it more visible and subject to reflection, debate, and conscious choice – the exercising of ethnic options (Wood, 1997: 19).

The reflection triggered by the act of putting onstage or performing ethnicity represents, for Oakes and Schein an indicator that the ethnic groups involved in ethnic tourism are modern subjects. Their research, as presented in the last chapter, has shown that the ethnic minorities are not just passive victims of tourism, seeing their cultural markers *demystified* (MacCannell, 1976: 94) but are instead implicated in the manipulation of the images representing them. They are accordingly "performing modernity" and are thus "authentically moderns." In other words, these authors are showing that the "ethnic minorities" are also involved in the creation of the 'onstage.'

Walsh actually questions the separation made by scholars between onstage and backstage ethnicity. She demonstrates how images of the Mosuo as matriarchal have enabled the men of Lakeside to avoid many everyday chores in the name of 'tradition', altering, as a result, the gendered division of labor of the village.

> The identity they articulate is thus not "pure," but affected by interactions with these outside representations, and indeed there is not one clearly identifiable identity but rather a layering of the staged and backstage, and the mixing of the two … Within this play of identity, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the "staged" from the "backstage," to distinguish between cultural representations the Mosuo are choosing to enact for tourists and those that they believe actually organize the way they live (2001: 98, 118).

The distinction between a 'true ethnicity' and a 'false ethnicity' is thus blurred.

A Brief Note on Culture

Ethnicity and culture are two murky terms whose precise definitions and usages have been and are still highly debatable. However the tentative definition Rousseau gives, by citing Keesing (1974: 89), may shed light on some of the intricacies we have encountered. Accordingly, culture is one's:

> ... *theory of what his fellows know*, believe, and mean, his theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he was born...It is this theory to which a native actor *refers* in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernaturals), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he creates the stage on which the games of life are played. [With this approach] we can account for the individual actor's perception of his culture as external (and as potentially constraining and frustrating); and we can account for the way individuals then can consciously use, manipulate, violate, and try to change what they conceive to be the rules of the game... (Rousseau, 1990: 49 *his italics*).

Hence, when Mueggler notes that he prefers to keep his focus away from the abstract concept of ethnicity, he does so to dismantle the idea of a 'Chinese culture' against which minorities are defined and positioned. Instead, Mueggler hopes to show the minorities are part of this Chinese culture and that, although they are aware of occupying in a "unique and troubled place within the Chinese nation" (2001: 19), they are nevertheless 'part of the game'. His approach, similarly to the one advanced by Rousseau, "... allows us to think instead of an open and flexible field of cultural practices, fashioned in the interactions of many different people. This field is not centered on any single deep-seated common cultural core; it is

historically and regionally diverse, and it ranges across ethnic and national boundaries" (Mueggler, 2001: 19).

Ethnicity, in this light, could be one set of rules of the game, a vocabulary of difference in culture, an unorganized and locally diverse way of situating oneself in the most populated country in the world. It is "people's conceptualization of their social and cultural life ... but it is not the inescapable frame of social relations" (Rousseau, 1990: 301).

Summary

With the introduction of ethnic tourism as one of the ways to develop the ethnic minorities of Southwest China, the official discourse of ethnicity has gained local importance. It is not only increasingly part of the vocabulary of the state and of administrators, but of minorities themselves. Indeed, ethnic tourism can be seen in China as a vehicle for the importation of the ethnic concept (Wood: 1997:26n18). People who used to describe themselves as 'local peasants' now use the vocabulary of ethnicity and may state instead: 'I am Miao'. "Ethnicity is more than a neutral scientific term; it has become part of the way people factually and prescriptively see themselves and others" (Wood, 1997: 7).

It has made local people more conscious of the 'cultural stuff' associated with their ethnic category. Accordingly, the use of ethnic categories to define oneself is not just a vocabulary borrowed by locals but becomes in fact part of who they are and how they organize the way they live (as demonstrated by Walsh, 2001). Ethnic tourism may actually intensify (Wood, 1997: 17) ethnic identity over other forms of identity by being a popular and 'accepted' form of self-expression[39]. Similar to Swain's observations about Christianity having become an important part of the Sani Yi's ethnic identity (in Harrell, 1995), we could begin to explore the importance of ethnic tourism in villagers' sense of ethnic identity.

CONCLUSION

> ...the most pressing need at the moment is for detailed ethnographic studies (Crick, 1994: 3; cited in Wood, 1997: 5).

As I noted in the beginning of this paper, ethnicity has come under extensive scrutiny by scholars in the past 50 years. It has permitted researchers to consider larger processes such as nation-states, the economy and politics. Ethnicity is perceived as a discursive formation involving both observers and local models. Comparatively, the official and popular discourses consider ethnic groups as cultural isolates. In the case of China, the political necessity to control the borders has led researchers to concentrate on the historical classification of peripheral people by the center of power. Intricately linked with issues of nationalism and boundary maintenance, the state *minzu shibie* project categorized the population of China into 56 *minzu* groups by overlooking differences with the Han category and neglecting some similarities between the other 55 categories. The official view of the population rests on a majority/minority (Han/non-Han) dichotomy that tends to be hierarchical.

Most of the approaches discussed in chapter two question the subordinate position ethnic groups have been associated with in official and popular discourses. They focus on processes and dialogues of ethnicity providing interesting insights into the larger processes integrating the locals. Such approaches have, however, led to studies that reproduce and perpetuate the official dichotomy and that are based upon an elite perspective. These approaches allow us to see what ethnicity means to people filming the ethnic performance in Zhaoxing, as well as to those performing it, yet they overlook the perspective of those

standing on the edge of the spectacle, dressed in Mao clothes. The perspective of the 'ordinary local peasant' is neglected. As Mueggler shows in his study of Zhizuo, ethnicity may not mean much at all in the everyday worries of local peasants and villagers.

Nevertheless, the conscious display of ethnic traits for the sake of tourism tends to trigger a reflective process whereby villagers may reassess their ways of living and may, as the Mosuo men, make changes in the social organization of the village. Yet the village of Lakeside, studied by Walsh, seems to be unique both in its 'ethnic' composition and its collectivization of tourism. And as ethnic tourism is increasingly promoted in 'minority' regions of China, without detailed ethnographic studies based on in-depth knowledge of a locality, we may not be able to assess the contribution ethnic tourism may have in some of the changes people experience in their everyday activities. We may indeed neglect issues of social stratification within a village and the tensions it may create, we may not perceive the generational and clan conflicts that may emerge and we may ignore the fact that villagers may also be tourists going to other regions.

This research based on a literary review and analysis, calls for more ethnographic studies, the face-to-face kind that allows for the voice of the ordinary local peasant to be heard. As Rousseau states: "people are primarily interested in understanding their neighbours, with whom they have frequent interaction..." (1990: 62). Accordingly, while social systems may be complex, the everyday reality of villagers may be relatively simple and straightforward (Ekholm-Friedman & Friedman, 1995: 134). Thus, while ethnicity may possibly provide interesting clues to many aspects of social life in China, it should not define, and as such restrict, the object of anthropological inquiry. "Do we, as anthropologists along with state bureaucrats, local elites, and tourists still want to make everyone learn to think

about, speak about, and identify themselves through discrete group identities to 'preserve' that difference? " (Bossen, 2002: 10)

The basic question of this thesis remains: how important are the ethnic categories and ethnicity locally in Southwest China[40]?

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ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE

[1] 'Popular' here means primarily the view of ethnicity as portrayed by the media and by political discourses.

[2] To cite only a few, there has been the Rwanda genocide, the fall of the USSR, the break-up of Yugoslavia, the continued struggle of Tibetans, Quebecois and Basques to obtain recognition as a 'distinct nation' based on religious, linguistic and cultural characteristics, etc.

[3] This is similar to the concept of race which had and still has tremendous consequences from being perceived as real, existing and legitimate.

[4] This was observed by Heberer (1989: 10-11): *China and its National Minorities. Autonomy or Assimilation?*

[5] Thanks to Professor Laurel Bossen for her insightful remarks as to who inspired whose work.

[6] Marx-Engels' model of the five stages are: primitive society, slavery society, feudal society, capitalism, socialism.

[7] All translation and meanings of characters were found in Oxford Concise English-Chinese/Chinese-English Dictionary, 2nd edition 1999.

[8] This number includes Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan; the census was done in 2000. It can be found on the following website: www.chinapage.com.

[9] We should not generalize too hastily the link between backwardness, primitiveness and ethnic minorities in popular view, since such stereotypes tend in fact to be more associated with regions (mainly rural and mountainous) regardless of the 'official' ethnicity of its inhabitants. Accordingly, an urban 'Bai' would probably be considered more advanced and 'civilized' than a Han peasant (drawing from Blum's research on Han perspectives of ethnic minorities, 2001).

[10] Ethnic minorities occupy 60% of the Chinese territory, mainly inland rural and remote areas. Most economic development since Deng Xiaopeng's policies have taken place in the coastal areas of China where most of the major cities are located (Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xianggang). The growing gap between the 'developed coast' and the 'backward interior' has led the government to turn its attention to the development of the western part of the country (through, for example, the promotion of tourism).

[11] English. A somewhat vertical axis, which one can consider as cultural in the broad sense, sets barbarism against the civilization and officialdom, which amounts to the same thing as non-Han and Han. This dimension is by definition hierarchical (my translation).

[12] Such as the "Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities, issued in May 1984, and implemented in October the same year, emphasized the promotion of national unity and group equality through a minority quota system...Since 1984 one can see a clear increase of minority members at all levels of government administration and representation (Wu, 1989: 13-14)".

[13] Francis Hsu is Chinese, he was born in Manchuria, yet his training as an anthropologist was mainly in the U.S.

[14] "Cultural isolates" denotes the idea ethnic minorities form culturally bounded groups.

CHAPTER TWO

[15] Henry Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1884) has had a significant impact on Chinese theoretical developments and on viewing the history of 'primitive societies' (see Guldin 1990: 15).

[16] The Mosuo is an ethnic group that is distinguished from other ethnic minorities and from the Naxi, on the basis of particular characteristics such as matriarchy and walking marriages.

[17] As exemplified by the distinctions between 'White Yi' and 'Black Yi', the Yi's ethnic consciousness is not often homogeneous, fitting into a neatly bounded category but, I presume, is rather perceived as an overall (umbrella like) official category. Harrell makes no mention of this as his goal it to demonstrate the various histories that were made of the Yi. For further information see Condominas (1998). Thanks to Professor Jérôme Rousseau for pointing this out to me.

[18] However, she does not mention where she borrowed the term, found in many other works on ethnicity such as, among others, *Creating Ethnicity : The Process of Ethnogenesis* by Eugeen E. Roosens (1989), and *In Search of Roots, a study of ethnogenesis* by Rizvi S.H.M. (1994). Harrell, in the introduction, also talks of ethnogenesis: "primarily as the reaction ... to a civilizing project (6)".

[19] At the time of Père Vial, in the late nineteenth century, China was under pressure from Europe to engage in commercial trade.

[20] Schein "take(s) modernity as a structure of feeling ... that is repeatedly instantiated by myriad performative acts that are elaborated and codified in the course of various moments of sociality (2000: 25)." In other words, she perceives modernity, similarly to Oakes, as a subjective (feeling) process, making minorities modern subjects rather than passive victims to a modern ideology promulgated by the dominant groups.

[21] This is from Blum, (2001: 55-56) and based on the 1990 census.

[22] He notes the presence of a poster in a secondary school in the Dong autonomous district of Yuping in Guizhou that states : *Tuanjie wenming qifenjin* which he translates as : *Travaillez ensemble avec constance et tenacité pour l'unité civilisatrice* (1998: 194). English. Work together with consistency and persistence for civilizing unity).

[23] She compares "Hanness" with "whiteness" in the US and although she demonstrates the many differences between the two, their commonality lies in both being unmarked categories: "that is people so classified will often be unaware of their own classification (57)". This implies that both do not have a so-called 'ethnic consciousness' that is linked to "whiteness" or "Hanness".

[24] As a mean to control the frontier areas moslty inhabited by ethnic minorities linked to groups in bordering countries, the Chinese government has, throughout history, sent and promoted the establishment of Han families (officials and their families) in minority areas. Throughout the *minzu shibie* project and up to this day some of these Han families claim minority status blurring, at the official level, the distinction Han/non-Han. Whether their motivation for a change of ethnic status is based on the relative advantages given to minorities in China (for example the exemption from the one-child policy) or on the emergence of an ethnic consciousness shared with other villagers furthermore indicates the need for additional local investigations.

[25] This is discussed in Hsu (1948: 16-17), Mueggler (2001: 10), and Walsh (2001: 101).

[26] This perspective is taken from Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities*, 1983.

[27] The community was in fact referred to as a 'brigade' and is now officially an administrative village (Ch. *cungongsuo*) (Mueggler, 2001 : 321n2).

[28] The villagers of Zhizuo find Lòlop'ò more appropriate than Yi and some, driven by the discourse on 'nationalities' were pushing for the recognition of their unique ethnicity (Mueggler, 2001: 14).

[29] In the work of Litzinger we saw that the educated minorities who return to their village provide new ways for villagers to define their everyday life, for Berlie they become agents of the state and contribute to the process of sinicization, while for Mueggler they are considered one of the bridges that make any ethnic community in China part of the Chinese state.

[30] According to Walsh, Lakeside receives approximately 20,000 tourists annually (2001: 101).

[31] These "are the 'traditional' Mosuo sexual partnerships. Walking marriages are made and kept voluntarily, and are largely free of economic ties. If a couple agrees to relations, the women receives her lover at her residence in the evening, and he leaves to return to his in the morning. Both remain socially and economically attached to their natal households, and the partnership can be dissolved by either. Children normally remain with the mother, take her family name, and are considered part of her household (Walsh, 2001: 96)".

[32] Note that I do not say the Mosuo, since the village, as noted earlier, comprises other 'ethnic groups' who pretend to be Mosuo for the sake of the economic returns from tourism.

[33] The dichotomy is mainly opposing the ideology of modernity (as defined by Giddens, 1990) with the idea of untouched, authentic, traditional groups. It is an opposition that can similarly parallel the separation between the urban/rural, and the past/future (Dupuis & Vandergeest, 1996:3).

[34] Although not mentioned above, for the sake of space, Mueggler speaks of the languages of the Yi and the debates regarding their classification. The people of his research speak what is today called the Central dialect of Yi (2001: 14), however: "... some linguists have noted that this dialect is much closer to the language of another "nationality", Lisu, than to any other Yi dialect" (Bradley 1978 cited in Mueggler, 2001: 14). This is a matter of linguistic categorization. It is only important for us to note that the specific dialect of the Lolò'pò can be taken as a marker of difference and thus of ethnicity.

[35] As pointed out by Peng Wenbin, the authors who make use of the ethnic dichotomy in their work may be in fact legitimizing and reproducing the Communist agenda as well as contributing to nationalist goals. This is a statement that definitely needs further research and inquiry into the relationship between western academia and the Chinese state.

[36] I am grateful for Peng Wenbin for pointing this out to me (PhD. University of Washington in Seattle).

CHAPTER THREE:

[37] English. On the one hand, it falls on them to sell to tourist customers a 'backward' country, a sort of ethnological museum filled with folk people while on the other hand they must sell tourism to host populations as a tool to modernization and economic development. Tourism that modernizes will end up eliminating folklore yet we would want to maintain these people in their folklore. I have no solutions to all that (my translation).

[38] This aspect of modernity is developed extensively by Guy Debord (1967).

[39] Although as a popular and 'accepted' form of identity, ethnic identity is limited by various factors such as stereotypes and preconceptions. These can, nonetheless, be somewhat re-constructed and re-produced by the minorities with some malleability (as shown by Schein, 2000).

CONCLUSION:

[40] I have consciously avoided the issue of language and dialect. Although language plays an important role in ethnic identity and its variations, its unsystematic relation to ethnic categories raises many issues that are beyond the scope of this thesis.