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Yongzhi Village

An example for sustainable tourism and development in Deqin County

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SIT: Chinese Culture and Ethnic Minorities

Spring 2011

Introduction

Nestled beneath misty mountain peaks, among the Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze rivers, a beautiful Tibetan village lies. Alongside low-lying mountain creeks and waterfalls this village is in Deqin County of Yunnan's Deqin Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Deqin TAP). The Deqin TAP is the most Northwest prefecture of Yunnan. Deqin boasts that 33% of its population is comprised of the dominant minority group, Tibetans. Deqin prefecture is comprised of three counties, Shangrila County, Deqin County, and Weixi County. Deqin County is mostly comprised of small Tibetan towns and villages like Yongzhi. About 100 families inhabit Yongzhi. The village is placed right along the famous outer-kora of the snow mountain, Kawa Karpo (Chinese: Meili Xueshan). This kora is one of the eight most important pilgrimages on the Tibetan plateau, putting Yongzhi directly in the path of a famous tourist and religious destination.

Since World War II tourism has emerged as the world's leading industry. This has been huge in developmental studies; tourism has always been a main focus as Third World countries use tourism opportunities to develop economically and improve the standard of living. (Chen 2011:125). In recent years, with the growth of tourism in all of Yunnan's northwest region, outsiders penetrating the village have started to appear in more variety than the original religious pilgrims whom have historically visited the area. Now, foreign and Chinese tourists are embarking on their own pilgrimage to the beautiful region and along the Kawa Karpo kora. This paper address how the impact of tourism on Yongzhi brings up issues regarding three differing types of tourism, mass-tourism, ethnic tourism and pilgrimage tourism, as they relate to eco-tourism and sustainable tourism in the region. This paper also seeks to address issues of modernity and development and

environmental issues as they also become apparent when tourism and development inevitably reach this small village.

The Kawa Karpo kora

Kawa Karpo is Yunnan's highest peak famed by its beauty and appearances throughout worldwide cultures, even appearing in *Star Wars*. Local Tibetans circumambulate Kawa Karpo for healing and long life multiple times a year. The inner kora of Kawa Karpo takes four to five days. The outer kora, which Yongzhi lies on, takes approximately two weeks to complete. Every villager in Yongzhi completes the kora, at the least once annually, even the sick, elderly, and newborn children. Other Tibetans from all around Tibet come to this pilgrimage destination as well for its greater significance, "Khawa Karpo is a palace for the Buddhist deity Düncho, a deity in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon for whom offerings are performed during the Kalacakra ceremony" (Kolås 2007:57). This puts Kawa Karpo on larger Tibetan scene giving it significance to Tibetan's across the plateau.

Thousands of pilgrims a year visit the mountain. The highest volume pilgrimage months are August through October, but more merit is credited to those who undergo the pilgrimage in worse weather conditions. This position on the kora of such a famous mountain has historically allowed for a continuous supply of outsiders coming through the village on their religious pilgrimages. Now a main focus has become tourist visitors to the region as they are drawn to Yongzhi for the ethnic background of the Tibetans inhabiting the village and for the beautiful sights seen at the sacred peaks, waterfalls and shrines Tibetans have historically worshiped.

Tourism

Anthropological tourism studies in the most general sense can be divided into two topics; the first seeks to understand tourism and its nature, the second, studies the impact of tourism, socially, economically, environmentally and culturally. (Annals, Graburn, 10). This paper more strongly focuses on the later of these two aspects, examining the host-guest relationship and questioning if the tourism activities of Yongzhi are culturally destructive and the agent through which non-sustainable development can reach the community. I suggest, in the tourism of Yongzhi's present state, this is not the case. These touring activities in Yongzhi are responsible forms of tourism, which are in fact, aiding to preserve the local Yongzhi culture and extreme biologically diverse ecosystems of the region.

Tourism has been declared by some specialists as culturally destructive. Davydd Greenwood states that culture "is turned into an explicit and paid performance and no longer can be believed in the way it was before. Thus, commoditizing of culture in effect robs people of the very meanings by which they organize their lives" (Greenwood, 137). Others believe tourism can be a means to cultural survival, this belief holds, that modernity is inevitable and as long as something authentic is being represented through tourism, culture is at least partially, and in some way being preserved. First we must examine the nature of different tourism practices seen in the Deqin TAP.

Types of tourists in Deqin TAP

The Mass Tourist

Yunnan's northwest economy greatly improved as mass tourism took dominance. Lijiang's and Dali's local business people have been able to capitalize on the images of local minority culture as hundred's of thousands of tourists visit the area a year to consume the ethnic culture. It is popular among Chinese tourists to come with large guided tour groups. The guide, often bearing a microphone, leads the large group through different attractions. The matching attire adorned by the tourists easily distinguishes these groups; matching rented winter jackets are often seen in Shangrila as mass-tourism has grown in the past decade since the renaming of the town. On May 5th, 2002 Zhongdian was officially renamed Shangrila. This name comes from a myth and creates mythical tourism, "The name Shangrila is not Tibetan, nor is it Chinese, it is a loan word from English, invented by the British author James Hilton when he wrote the best-selling novel *Lost Horizon* (1933)" (Kolås, 5). This controversial name claim has thrust the region to the front of many tourists' desired destinations and the town is now fostering mass amounts of visitors a year.

These mass-tour groups are not aware how detrimental their actions are to the local ecology and cultural practices. It has been widely stated that domestic mass tourists are not aware of their individual littering habits' effect on the surrounding area. Areas frequented by domestic mass-tour groups are often littered with wrappers and empty bottles. Dakpa Kelsing the founder of Khampa Caravan, a local sustainable tourism trekking company, believes sustainable tourism is best practices on a smaller scale with education opportunities and awareness about local issues and green tourism. Through small-scale tour companies like Khampa Caravan, with goals of sustainability and environmental awareness, tourism can be a positive force on the local area, rather than a destructive force as modernity and globalization inevitably seep in. Through the

engrained collective thought, that the individual mass-tourist is one of many, and therefore unaccountable for his or her individual actions, mass-tourism leaves a deep footprint in toured areas around the world. This impact creates a need for discussion of fundamental changes in tourism.

Kelsing tells how tour groups are brought to outdoor attractions early in the morning when it is still quite cool. Because so many groups are brought at the same time they are forced to wait in long lines and then often fall trap to renting jackets while they shiver in line. He claims most of these attractions are much more enjoyable in the afternoon, the morning tour group trips are just a ploy to rent jackets and benefit economically immediately. Kelsing explains this is not a sustainable why to carry out tourism. The tourists will enjoy the experience less and are less likely to come back or recommend it, thus diminishing the future success of the tour. By providing the tourist the best experience possible, while adhering to responsible tourism practices, the success of sustainable tourism can be increased. By creating a desire for smaller-scale tours, sustainable tourism can become more successful.

The Ethnic Tourist

Ethnic tourists seek to see the “other,” a theme throughout many types of tourism and a dominating theme in ethnic tourism. In China, minority labels, established by the “ethnic identification project” project (*minzu shibie*), are claimed to stereotype, sexualize, and exoticize the individual minority people. It is also explained that this project was done for the purpose of unifying the Chinese nation in the classification of the majority, Han (Fei 1988, Gladney 1994, Sinclair 1987a). As this Han majority is in a sense

imagined, as they don't meet the criteria set forth by the classification project to be classified as one ethnic group. Yet the Han identity exists now by governmental efforts to display the Han majority as normal and un-exotic. This exotic "other" promoted by Chinese minority classifications creates the desire, by predominately Han Chinese, to tour the minority regions. This tourism has grown to massive scales, which have lead to the capitalization of these cultures. This mass tourism attraction of the minority culture leads to false representations and exploitation of culture, "The commodification of minorities is accomplished through the representing, packaging, and selling of their images, artworks, and "costumes" in the many pictorial gazetteers" (Gladney, 1994:97). Minority cultures are being marketed and exploited for the economic gain possible from ethnic tourism.

Minority tourism in the region has been a main focus of the Chinese government as an economy booster in Yunnan for the past few decades, "Culture departments sponsor popular culture not only for the local population but also for tourism, which is becoming an important part of the economy. For instance, in 1998, officials in Dechin TAP [Deqin Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture] developed a five-point plan that listed as one of its top priorities the rescue of Tibetan culture, which was recognized as worthy of investment because of tourism" (Kolås 2006:144). The local people and government's recognition of the desire by tourists to see Tibetan and other minority cultures has created a lot of efforts in the region to capitalize on the otherness of the local minority people. The promotion of this type of tourism has created detrimental mass-tourism practices throughout Yunnan, not just in the Deqin Prefecture but also in cities stretching through Yunnan like Xishuangbanna, Lijiang and Dali.

Greenwood, like Gladney, believes cultural tourism is commoditizing and exploiting cultural traditions, “culture is being packaged, priced, and sold like building lots, rights-of-way, fast food, and room service, as the tourism industry inexorably extends its grasp... All the ‘natural resources’ including cultural traditions have their price, and if you have the money in hand, it is your right to see whatever you wish” (Greenwood, 1977:136). This “packaging” of culture creates false images and the replication of cultural items, which are neither real nor authentic.

These culturally representative items do not contribute to the preservation of the culture as globalization sweeps through the region. In Shangri-la’s old town shops line the carefully and recently constructed “ancient” cobble stone streets with souvenirs that are simply a representation of the cultural image the tourist wants to see. Rarely are these souvenirs even made in the country, yet alone crafted by traditional folk artists or local minority artisans. “Old town gift shops are making lots of money but erasing culture” a local trekking company owner stated about these shops. Locals have realized the expensive and authentic handicrafts aren’t desirable to the mass-tourists and have begun to commoditized the local surrounding cultures into mass produced items the tourists want to barter for and local shop owners can capitalize on.

In recognition of this kind of replication of culture, folk tradition, and heritage, in Ethnicity, Inc. John and Jean Camaroff tackle the concerns over lost cultures as globalization and tourism “flatten” our planet, affecting some of the farthest removed civilizations. Concluding that globalizing something doesn’t necessarily mean there is a loss of culture, the Camaroffs do address that there have been cultural losses as tourism and capitalism extend far into ancient cultures. They explain that “the more successful

any ethnic population is in commodifying its difference, the faster it will debase whatever made it different to begin with” (Camaroff, 2009:19). They go on to address how “‘ethnic tourism’ is frequently said to ‘destroy...that which it seeks,’ creating, in place of [the appearance of] ‘authenticity,’ a feeling of ‘cultural flatness’” (Camaroff, 2009:20). As observed in Lijiang, the culture being consumed can no longer even be considered a representation of something authentic; the exploited town appears “culturally flattened” to its foreign visitors and ethnic tourists.

Shangri-la, though not quite at the volume of tourism other northwest Yunnan cities like Lijiang are at, yet, has begun to hold this cultural insignificance and “flatness” to many tourists. This atmosphere creates a desire for the ethnic tourist to leave Shangri-la’s old town, tackle bumpy roads and long bus rides into seemingly uncharted territories. These tourists find themselves in small villages like Yongzhi. Where their business will still have an effect on the real local culture. Often these tourists come via trekking and guiding companies with eco-tourism goals in mind such as Dakpa Kelsing’s respectable, Khampa Caravan and Dakpa Tsering’s Tibet Any Tour. This tourism though, can be seen as imperialism or colonialism as Darya Moaz explains, “tourists, in their search for a pure and authentic past, project their desires onto the less developed, and the Third World becomes the playground of their imagination and a target to conquer and consume” (Moaz, 223). This could unfairly portray these Tibetans as barbarians or primitive.

The Pilgrim tourist

The pilgrim tourist’s first desire is not to see the “other” as the ethnic tourist seeks to see; rather the pilgrim tourist is seeking a destination and spiritual connection. This is

often done as religious travel, but it does not need to be for the general sense of religious motives, “Spirituality has always been important in pilgrimage, but some analysts of religious tourism have now pointed to a shift away from traditional religious activities towards a much broader view of ‘spirituality’ or ‘holistic’ reasons for travel.” (Richards 2006:220). Tourism for the purpose of connecting spiritually with a site, whether it is a spiritual connection to the surroundings and nature, or for a religiously significant meaning, has increasingly been referred to as a pilgrimage type of tourism experience. Some forms of tourism can be seen as a journey with a spiritual meaning. Tourists choose to spend their money on an experience, seeking an “altered state,” rather than material gains, signifying a symbolic sacredness to travel and the places we chose to travel (Gradburn 1974:28).

This pilgrimage analogy is all too literal on sacred Tibetan ground like the Kawa Karpo pilgrimage. As Kolås (2007) explains, the Shangri-la tourist’s experience, visiting mountain pilgrimages and monasteries, is often self-explained as a pilgrimage. She refers to the travelogue, *Pilgrimage to Meili Snow Mountain*, in which a Han Chinese tourist focuses her act as a spiritual pilgrimage rather than a recreational trip. This idea has further been used as a marketing ploy, “In Shangrila, tourism there seems to be a growing focus on pilgrimage as a key feature of the tourist experience. This is reflected in the promotion of Shangrila tourism, which is rife with references to pilgrimage, spirituality and everything religious” (Tourism, Kolås, 73). This portrayal of the pilgrim and religious tourist experience draws an abundance of this type of pilgrim tourist to the region.

The most adventurous of these pilgrim tourists find themselves in Tibetan regions like the Kawa Karpo area Yongzhi can be found in. These tourists, seeking a spiritual connection with nature, are often guided by local Tibetans who grew up in the region and know the trails better than any non-local guide ever could. Many trekking companies operate under the precedence that for this reason a Tibetan tour guide is much more desirable than a Chinese or foreign tour guide.

During a two-night guided trek with Dashi, the 23 year-old son of Dorje and his wife, my Yongzhi host family, I was able to participate in a guided pilgrim tourist activity. From the influences of Khampa Caravan, Dashi is conscious of carrying out waste and reducing the impact of the tourist treks he leads. With extreme resourcefulness, such as crafting chopsticks from bamboo, Dashi bounds up the trails he has grown up trekking. The pilgrim tourist is seeking this connection the local Tibetans have to the natural environment and seek an example through their guided treks. This has created a new type of tour guiding profession in Tibetan villages.

The Tourist and Host Gaze

Touring, in particularly when done as ethnic and pilgrim tourism, is often comprised of viewing and gazing at people and things that are portrayed as exotic. Anthropologists studying tourism refer to this act of gazing as “the tourist gaze” (Urry 1990). This implies the tourist is objectifying the host by seeking contact with “authentic” and “real” locals. Others in the study of tourism have furthered this explanation of the “tourist gaze” by giving the host a gaze upon the tourist as well. In her research of backpacker tourism Darya Moaz (2005) terms the dichotomy between these two gazes

the “mutual gaze.” These gazes are said to influence the actions of each party. We act as we expect the gaze to portray us, Maoz suggests Israeli backpackers in India assume the gazes of shopkeepers, hostel attendants, and guesthouse owners portray them as “rude” and “hedonistic,” this entitles the Israeli backpackers to often fulfill this stereotype. She states these gazes create mutual exploitation and a cycle of adverse feelings, “Such feelings, in turn, reinforce the fixed images and gazes and obstruct close relations based on trust and real encounter. The superficial and distant encounter between the two groups in turn reinforces their stereotypical views of each other, thus creating an ongoing situation of distance and mistrust” (Moaz 2005:235). In Yongzhi the interaction of gazes between host and tourist is portentously present, affecting the interactions between host and tourist.

In my short time in Yongzhi I was gazed upon as an outsider, and at times as a tourist. I found that my presence created some boundary dissolution and I was the subject of different types of confused gazes. When I was alone in the village or with another western foreigner, my classmate Madeline, I felt like an intruder. As I entered any situation and my presence was acknowledged the atmosphere changed. Whether it is by sitting up straighter or smiling in acknowledgement the locals indicate they possess a gaze towards outsiders. Often a unique but rehearsed “mask” appeared on each individual preventing us from a deeper connection. I was staying in an eco-lodge with Dorje, his wife and their son, Dashi. Dashi, like me, is in his early twenties, and he became my best friend in the village. In my interactions with people in the village, when Dashi and his family weren’t present, people would mention my host family and their, usually familial, relationship to my hosts. In these cases I was viewed as a guest of Dashi and his family. Dashi’s family holds a symbol for the introduction of tourism to the valley. When I was

seen in the context of this family, I was viewed as another tourist. By virtue of owning and living in the village eco-lodge, this family has become the perceived agent through which tourists enter the village.

I felt my pretense as just another tourist most when I was hiking with Dashi. I was hardly worth a glance from locals when I was in the footsteps of Dashi along mountain trails. They are accustomed to seeing foreign tourists trailing Dashi and his family in trekking trips, during these encounters Dashi is seen as a local tour guide. I was just a part of the background scenery, as locals stopped along the trail to talk to Dashi - the tour guide. My presence prevented this interaction from being with Dashi - their friend and neighbor. Had my time in the village been on a much longer and a more appropriate anthropological field study timeline I may have been able to progress my significance in the village so that when I was hiking with Dashi, others would see us as two peers rather than, tourist-guide, westerner-Tibetan, or male-female relationships.

The relationships of male-female and westerner-Tibetan would always exist and, in some societies, possibly never have the potential to appear as a peer relationship. Societies do exist where the individual male and individual female can be known and seen as individuals with a more elaborate understanding by the community. This deeper understanding of the individuals gives this socially perceived dichotomy between male and female the potential to become a perceived equal ground. Similarly, the western foreigner penetrating a small non-western community may also never reach this even grounded relationship with non-westerners, but in some accepting societies it is possible for this multifaceted understanding of the westerner to exist allowing the communal village perception to see beyond the white skin.

Anthropologist Nigel Barley (2001:146-182) experienced the westerner and non-westerner relationship interactions in his studies of his “Dowayoland” in northern Cameroon. After an extended anthropological stay, which allowed him to establish personal relationships with Dowayo people, as he left he was still expected to leave more behind for gifts than a Dowayo leaving the community. He also was expected to pay more for things and services in this very status conscious society, just because of his status as a white European male. Although these inequalities existed Barley was able to establish some peer-leveled relationships with Dowayo people.

Because Yongzhi provides a small and accepting community this deeper understanding by the community of the individual, and the communal perception of the individual, allows the relationship of male-female or westerner-Tibetan to achieve a perceived equal ground. If more time was allowed in Yongzhi the perception of the female westerner and male Tibetan hiking together would no longer be perceived as the unequal guide and tourist, but could have the potential to be seen as peered friends enjoying nature together.

Known for their remarkable hiking abilities the people of Yongzhi have dedicated their lives to conquering difficult mountain passes in order to pay their respect to mountain deities and local shrines. Dashi explained to me that Yongzhi people believe in sharing their sacred land and hikes with people from any place and any religion. Tibetan’s do expect visitors to respect the land and power it holds just as the local Tibetans do. Kolås tells how a Tibetan man explained “ ‘this area is different from central Tibet... Here, we are used to different people visiting our place, and whoever wants to come to a holy mountain is welcome, no matter what their beliefs’ ” (Kolås 2007:76).

During my stay in the village it appeared many locals appreciate that others see an importance in the land as well.

I felt a very different gaze upon me while I was hiking alone. During a trip to a near-by sacred waterfall, locals I passed along the trail gave me a thumbs up in encouragement of my desire to seek out this spiritual connection with nature on my own. During another hike, I came across women carrying baskets of gathered edible plants they asked me to sit and rest with them, including me in the moment and asking me to finish the hike back into the village along side them. Here I was perceived in the best gaze during my stay in the village, possibly just starting to deepen the communal understanding and connection to me, the outsider, by exhibiting the skill and ability to hike on my own. I was appreciating their sacred land on my own and had exhibited independence. My ability to see the land was no longer reliant on Dashi's guidance; for brief moments, villagers were able to see my ability to exist in the village as something other than a western tourist.

Just as the gaze upon me hiking alone and hiking with Dashi varied the gaze upon me in the village changed when I was accompanied by Dashi. Towards the end of my stay in Yongzhi we walked to the center of town by the prayer wheels and pool tables. Dashi disappeared inside to the pool tables, before I went inside, I sat outside and was able to converse with a cluster of women as they did each other's hair. They openly showed me how they were doing each other's hair, and the women who chose to still wear their hair in traditional style showed me the beautiful strands of color they braid into their hair before wrapping it on the top of their heads. They were comfortable sharing

with me their culture and dress that I wasn't familiar with. Because I was with Dashi I was more easily accepted into the social scene as we approached it.

Rather than our relationship appearing as the tourist-guide relationship as it had while we hiked together, I was perceived as Dashi's friend, possibly on a peer level. Because I had previously explored the village without Dashi it gave credibility to our friendship when I was in the village with him. He was with me at places I had already been seen at alone; I was clearly not reliant on him showing me the area. Being in the company of Dashi while in the village was a choice we had been perceived to make because we had established a friendship, and preferred to wander the village in each others company rather than alone.

The last gaze I was the subject of was that of Dashi and his family. Possibly because our relationship was more complex and I value it more than my relationship with the villagers it is difficult for me to discern how this gaze portrayed me. I never stopped being a visiting guest in their home, despite how hard I tried to aid in food preparation and household chores I was often prevented from doing this as the family waited on me.

Dashi's mother does not speak Chinese so our relationship was limited to non-verbal communication. When I had tried to help her prepare food in the kitchen she thought I was there asking for food because I was hungry, rather than trying to help, so she simply prepared the food faster while I stood unable to aid in the food preparation and helplessly unable to tell her to take her time, I was not there to rush her along. I was unable to break the boundary of tourist guest, or an outsider friend of Dashi's in her eyes.

Dashi and I were able to have fun playing card games, talking, exchanging stories about our lives and hiking. I would like to think our relationship achieved a level that no

longer resembles that of the tourist and guide, but there were still times even towards the end of my stay, after I had physically forced him to let me help out at times, that he waited on me and would prevent me from helping with cleaning or food preparation. But, as tears welled up in both of our eyes as Dashi saw me off the morning I was getting on a bus in Deqin to leave I realized this relationship had certainly developed beyond tourist and guide into a friendship.

The gaze upon me by Dashi and his family varies from the gaze they have on the tourists staying with them and going on guided treks by Dashi or his family members. Dashi explained to me that he saw foreign tourists as more able than the few Chinese tourists' he had guided. He told that is father would often bring tourists to the community center to dance and drink at night. They see foreign tourists as partiers, they do not ordinarily go to the community center on a typical night without tourists, this place has become the hang out for drinkers whom Dashi explained often don't have money and have found liquored up tourists on these evenings a good target for pick-pocketing. It would appear then, that the other locals perceive tourists as easily scammed. To Dashi and his family tourists then become cultural infants who need babysitting and constant care and protection. They also realize these tourists also need to be educated on eco-tourism practices.

Environmental and Cultural Protection Discourse in Yongzhi

There is awareness among Yongzhi people that the local environment's extreme biodiversity needs protecting. The Nature Conservancy, founded in 1951, one of the largest private conservation NGOs in the world, has done a considerable amount of

efforts in the area. The Nature Conservancy holds the vision to non-confrontationally and collaboratively protect nature all around the world for people today and future generations. With the mission statement: “to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive,” The Nature Conservancy has identified the area around Yongzhi as biologically and culturally important for its diversity and beauty, which needs to be protected.

In Yongzhi and its surrounding areas The Nature Conservancy, in collaboration with other agencies and the Chinese government, has worked to educate locals on the issues regarding the environment and sustainable living practices. The Meili Pride Campaign and the Three Parallel Rivers Project have made a huge impact in the region holding educational classes, posting signs in Chinese and English to raise awareness and appreciation to the biodiversity to visitors, and teaching sustainable living practices by integrating greener architecture into local lifestyles to lessen the wood burning usage for heating homes.

Lining the roads and trekking paths throughout Deqin County are signs stating the efforts of the Three Parallel Rivers project, which are, “respecting nature,” “protecting environment,” “developing culture” and “continuing history.” These signs can be seen marking local townships and villages, notable mountain passes, and distinguishing the different types of forests and ecosystems as traversing through the region leads one through an abundance of biologically diverse areas provided by the extreme altitude differences and three rivers proximity, the Salween, Mekong and Yangtze are running parallel in just 50 km apart.

These projects and awareness efforts have improved the standard of living in Yongzhi. As modernity is inevitably seeping in, it is being introduced in a more sustainable manner. More environmentally friendly indoor heating methods and solar power have been introduced to the area. Yongzhi village is pleasant for the visitor and more pleasant for its inhabitants because of maintained roads through the town, running water, indoor toilets, cell phone service, electricity and television access. There are massive amounts of road construction being carried out throughout Deqin County, including a road planned to be finished in three years along Yongzhi and beyond to other villages in the mountains.

The locals are aware this road will greatly change the area. Many have come to terms with these expected changes and there is an abundance of protection efforts throughout the region, ensuring environmentally sound practices in the area as it develops. The road construction and development is currently providing job opportunities to locals, which is beefing up the economy. This new road isn't expected to affect tourism increases, there is already a road directly to Yongzhi and this new road is an extension of the one already in place, it will not enable tourists any more than this current road already does.

I was able to witness a public form of this discussion on forest protection during my stay in Yongzhi. One night Dashi was advocating, stronger than normally, to go to the local community center where singing, dancing and drinking typically took place. When we first arrived the place was fuller than I had ever seen it, it seemed the entire village was there. Many people were watching as others joined in a circle dance to traditional Tibetan music. After the dancing subsided individuals stood and gave speeches in the

local Tibetan language regarding taxes, new road construction, and forest protection. Individuals would clap and cheer after the individual speeches they agreed with this most. After this debate each family paid their tax dues, which go towards forest protection efforts. During this debate Dashi clearly aligned himself with one man's speech. After the evening when I asked him further clarification, in Chinese, on his views of the road construction issues, he simply said to me the road is okay, not bad.

The locals are also aware of eco-tourism practices. Khampa Caravan, with a sign posted on the side of the eco-lodge, has a presence, which has been an agent for this knowledge to enter the region. Efforts through the Meili Pride Campaign and The Nature Conservancy have also educated the locals on eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism and sustainable tourism

Ecotourism as defined by The International Ecotourism Society (1990) is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people". In 1997 the United Nations declared a global effort towards sustainable tourism, which states in order for tourism to be sustainable it, must be culturally, environmentally, and economically stable (Cavin, 1999). Specialists in the field have continued to recognize that, "The cooperation between local people, managers, and 'specialists' such as anthropologists and ecologists is the principle of eco-cultural tourism. Mutual respect and communication is the basis of this cooperation" (Chen 2011:127). In Yongzhi, tourism at the current state, does not violate this eco-tourism definition. Predominately the local people, not just outsiders, are benefitting

economically and with intangible experiences and understandings with the outside world and modernity.

Khampa Caravan, aligned with The Nature Conservancy, has been able to further the area's environmental and cultural efforts in particularly as they relate to tourism. With the belief that knowledge and understanding needs to be behind the tourism acts in order to preserve the culture it seeks to explore, Khampa Caravan has helped to raise this awareness and goals of sustainable eco-friendly tourism. Stated in the Khampa Caravan mission page is, "we take tourism as an opportunity to proactively protect and further develop our rich cultural heritage and awareness. Khampa Caravan will ensure that the travel experience is meaningful for both the host and visitor" (Khampa Caravan). Dashi told me many stories of individual experiences he had with tourists, often referring to them as his friends. The village is maintained to a higher standard of living and local people are benefiting from this tourism, not just the tourists and outside agencies. Other tourism practices in northwest Yunnan though, do need to evolve from the entitled views and exploitive practices it too often exhibits, to the mutually beneficial, to both host and tourist, visions sustainable tourism promotes.

Small companies that realize eco-tourism is more than just having nature as your destination, like Khampa Caravan and Tibet Any Tour, both based out of Shangrila, give hope to the further success of eco-tourism and sustainable tourist practices in the region. They realize environmentally and culturally friendly practices need to be the mission of the company. They need to focus on economically supporting local people, educating both hosts and tourists, carry out trash habits, environmentally sensitive hazardous chemical handling, eco-friendly transportation, and plant and wildlife protection are all

components of eco-tourism. These components must be carried in order to prevent this nature destination travel from becoming just another threat to the region's cultural and biologically diverse ecosystems.

Eco-tourism seeks to provide positive opportunities for local people. Dakpa Tsering, founder of Tibet Any Tour, explained to me the local Shangrila treks he brings his clients on, through small communities out side of Shangrila. He is sure to stop for lunch at local people's homes or restaurants and pay for using their land to tour on. This gives the tourist an authentic view of Tibetan culture, and brings business to local people. All of this, he carries out with ecologically sound practices that promote the real local cultures rather than the imagined and mythical cultural images promoted in many of Shangrila old town's shops and mass-tourism destinations.

In implementing eco-tourism and sustainable tourism plans it is important to include participation of the locals. Yongzhi is succeeding in this, local people are running the guided treks and there is constant community discussion regarding tourism, cultural, and environmental issues. "It is increasingly being recognized that local people should be included and involved in the tourism development process and that their participation is important to make tourism sustainable and responsible" (Chen 2011:131). It is evident, as Chen suggests is important, that local people have been included and will continue to be included in tourism development in Yongzhi. Locals, specialists, tourists, and government officials need to ensure that tourism companies align their goals with the goals produced from the collaboration and discussion of the local people, business people and environmental and social scientists specializing in development and preservation, increasing sustainable and eco-tourism.

Conclusion

Is tourism in Yongzhi sustainable and ecologically sound? Yes, in its current form; tourism in Yongzhi will not impede the desires and happiness of future generations. The local culture, economy, society, and environment is not seeing detrimental affects of tourism, as long as these current tourism practices are being maintained the success of sustainable and eco-tourism will prevail. As there are many areas in Yunnan, where vivid and fertile environments and cultures are confronting and coping with exploitation and annihilation by the force of unwise and irresponsible tourism practices, Yongzhi is not facing this treat from its tourism industry. The potential and forthcoming results of tourism in Yongzhi are reliant on continued sustainable tourism and developmental practices.

Appendix I

Subjective account

I focused on getting to know a fewer number of people relatively well, rather than interviewing a ton of people in Yongzhi. I prefer not to use translators because of increased miscommunication and the subjectivity of the translator. Also, paying for the transportation for a translator to come to Yongzhi, and then for the service while in Yongzhi, wasn't in my budget. Because my Chinese language skills are fairly elementary, and many villagers in Yongzhi speak Chinese as their second language, if they speak it at all, I found observation and establishing more personal relationships as

the best way to answer my questions and seek an understanding anthropologically of the village. I also found it very helpful to rely on participant observation; I was able go on a guided trek with Dashi and could see his guiding practices in action.

During my time in Yongzhi I found it most helpful to just tag along as locals went about their day. I wish I had learned this earlier, towards the end of my stay I become more confident in doing this and found that not only was I exposed to more in the village but also the perception, or gaze, locals had of me after I began doing this changed for the better.

The short time period of this project left a lot to be desired from my experience, but it was a great self-introduction into field study and something I'd like to expand upon. I learned a lot about combining my individual findings with that of experts in the field. This is the largest project I've personally completed and it was great preparation for further studies if I pursue anthropology in my future education and career.

Transportation is always a challenge in Deqin County. I learned this in March when I went to the area during the Yunnan Exploration Project and was snowed into Deqin for four days. In this typical, inconvenient style and by virtue of being surrounded by hazardous mountain terrain, en route to Yongzhi I found myself stuck overnight in the Yunling Township across the river from Yongzhi because of a landslide blocking the road.

Most of all I benefitted from and enjoyed my friendship with Dashi and time spent in Yongzhi, isolated from Internet and my friends in Kunming and the United States. I found that reentry to this faster lifestyle was overwhelming and I quickly yearned for my spoiled and simple lifestyle in Yongzhi. I hope others will be able have a

similarly beneficial experience in Yongzhi despite inevitable changes to come as the region develops. I hope to see the local culture, individuals, environment, and tourism continue to co-exist sustainably throughout this development.

Appendix II

Itinerary

May 5th 2011 – At 8:00am I took a bus from Shangrila to Deqin (8 hours, 55 RMB).

Madeline offhandedly decided to join me in Yongzhi so I shared a cab to Feilai Si (30 min, 15 RMB) and spent the night in Feilai Si while I waited for Madeline to come in on the 6th.

May 6th 2011 – I took a cab to meet Madeline and Dashi in Deqin around 6pm (30 min, 30 RMB), we made it as far as Yunling where we were stuck overnight due to a landslide.

May 7th 2011 – arrived in Yongzhi with Madeline and Dashi in the early afternoon, (we paid Dashi 200 RMB for picking us up in Deqin).

May 7th 2011 – May 21st 2011 – Stayed in Yongzhi for 55 RMB per night, conducting individual research for my project.

May 21st 2011 – Dashi gave me a ride to Deqin (300 RMB) in time for the 9:00am bus(55 RMB) to Shangrila.

May 22nd 2011- I spent the day in Shangrila with Dakpa Tsering discussing ecotourism and the practices of his company.

May 23rd 2011- Overnight bus to Kunming (10 hours, 255 RMB).

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Informants

Yongzhi

- Dashi
- Dorje
- Yongzhi Locals

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Suggestions for other ISP topics

- Environmental efforts not directly related to tourism
- Biological studies of the extreme biodiversity in the surrounding wilderness
- Analyze guided treks with tourists by a variety of different companies around Tibetan regions
- Tibetan/minority education in Deqin/Yunnan