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Tipping Point: A Study of Tourism and Development in Cizhong

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**Tipping Point:
A Study of Tourism and Development in Cizhong**

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, development in rural areas of China has been increasing rapidly due in large part to the growth of tourism throughout the country. My project analyzes this phenomenon using Cizhong, a Tibetan Catholic village in northwestern Yunnan, as a case study. Since 2006, the popularity of Cizhong as a tourist destination has grown slowly. However, thanks to recent government policies enacted to increase tourism and development in the area, this village is on the verge of experiencing extremely rapid growth. Over the course of three weeks, extensive participant observation was combined with nearly a dozen informal interviews to create a detailed description of Cizhong at this critical moment in time. This snapshot includes both the current status of government development policies in area, as well their effects on the local population. While it was found that some economic benefits have been created from these initiatives, these were often outweighed by issues related to the confiscation and destruction of land. I then use these findings to provide speculative analysis on the future of Cizhong, with food security and changing religious demographics being predicted to be the most pressing issues to arise.

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Introduction

In January of 2015, as I was preparing for my travels in Yunnan, I purchased a guidebook on the province in order to become familiar with the area. Among the glossy pictures of snowcapped mountains and women in their colorful tradition clothes, one page in particular caught my attention. It was about a small village that was perched above the Mekong River in northwest of Yunnan called Cizhong. What interested me about the area was the fact that, though most of the residents were ethnically Tibetan, they were practitioners of Roman Catholicism. As I continued to read, I was told of the remoteness of Cizhong, how few visitors came to the area, and of an inaccessibility that was so strong the village even lacked a priest.

Coming for the first time to the village in March of 2015, I discovered much had changed since the publication of the book in 2009. Far from being unknown and undeveloped, there was a highway near the village bringing dozens of tourists the church, which had a full time priest that presided over Mass every Sunday. The author and publisher, however, are not to blame. China is developing extremely rapidly, especially in rural areas, thanks in large part the creation of a large tourism industry in the country.

The purpose of this paper is to understand this process of rural development and tourism by looking at the case of Cizhong. What makes this village of particular note is that it is currently at a tipping point on its path to development. Though the amount of visitors has steadily been increasing over the past decade, major state-backed initiatives are going to cause tourism to increase rapidly. The government is also in the process of enacting major development projects that, when complete, will irreversibly change the physical and cultural landscape of the area. Throughout this paper, I will be creating a snapshot of Cizhong before these large and dramatic changes occur. In providing this picture of a pre-developed Cizhong,

I seek to create a foundation for future research on this village, as well as a reference for future scholars who wish to gain insight on the early stages of rural development in China.

In Section 1, I give brief histories of Tibetan Catholicism and the village of Cizhong in order to provide a basic sense of the religious practices that have made the area famous. Section 2 is dedicated to the growth of tourism in the area, and is further divided into three sections. Section 2.1 discusses the regional factors that have made the growth of tourism in Cizhong possible. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 are dedicated to describing the current state of tourism in Cizhong, and addressing government policies and economic impacts, respectively. Section 3 delves into issues of development, and is divided into two parts dedicated to infrastructure projects (3.1) and a recent dam project (3.2). Finally, I use Section 4 to analyze the data and provide speculations on possible outcomes of increased tourism and development in the area.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Cizhong village from May 3rd to 22nd, 2015. The primary method of gathering information was through informal conversations with villagers in Cizhong. To get the widest perspective possible, these people were from a variety of ages, occupations, and genders. In order to avoid the collection of private identifiable information, questions posed to the villagers were strictly limited to policies and practices related to the recent development and tourism of the area. These included, but were not limited to:

- When did tourists start arriving to Cizhong?
- What policies has the government made to bring in more tourists?
- What is your opinion of these tourism related policies?
- Do you feel that tourists help benefit the local economy?
- How do you feel about the recent road construction going on?
- What is your opinion on the recent relocation program?
- Do you approve of the government's development plan for the area?
- Did villagers have any input in these plans?

These questions were tailored to the individual based on their demographic information. For example, the elderly were asked questions about changes in Cizhong over time, while questions about current opportunities were asked of younger people. Responses to these questions, as well as other observations and comments, were written down following the interview.

The main drawback of this method was the limited Chinese language skills of both myself and some of the informants. Before starting this study period, I had only studied two years of Mandarin. While this provided a solid foundation to work off of, and I could at least understand the general meaning of a conversation, there were times where my vocabulary was not broad enough to capture the nuances of what the person was saying. Furthermore, for the majority of residents in the area, Tibetan was their first language. While not a large issue for younger people who were taught Mandarin under a PRC education system, many of the elderly in the village spoke only a small amount of heavily accented Mandarin. This limited

the number of older people I had conversations with and the information I could obtain from that generation. All residents, however, preferred using Tibetan in group environments. This was problematic, since it could lead to me being excluded from conversations in more social settings. In order to avoid this type of situation, every attempt was made to have conversations on an individual basis. Conducting informal interviews in this manner had the additional benefit of providing people with a more confidential setting and allowed them to be more honest in their responses.

No formal interviews were conducted during this period. This is due to the somewhat sensitive nature of the development projects being completed in the area, specifically the local dam. Though information on the project is publically available in Chinese on the Diqing government website, villagers have been discouraged by local government officials from discussing the issue with foreigners. While many villagers were willing to disregard this directive in private conversations, taking notes during interviews would have either caused informants to be more guarded in their answers, or would have prevented them from talking to me at all. Therefore, in keeping with informants' wishes to remain unidentified, all names have been redacted, and only generalized information on occupation and age have been provided. While this limits the verifiability and reproducibility of this study, these precautions are necessary to ensure the anonymity of those that were willing to provide me with this invaluable information.

Data collected through participant observation was also essential to this study. Living with a local family and helping them in their everyday chores and farm work allowed me to gain a strong personal perspective on the rigors of village life and the effects that development is having on the citizens of Cizhong. Additionally, members of the family were able to introduce me to numerous other villagers and helped me establish connections within the community. I was also active in participating in other social activities in the village, such

as attending Mass four times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays nights, as well as Sunday morning), and engaging in recreational activities with the village men. The rapport built through engaging with the people of Cizhong in these ways was essential to making this study possible. Without being involved and taking the time to build trust, the information necessary for this research would have been impossible to obtain.

In addition to collecting this data on locals, I was also sure to collect information on the drivers of change in Cizhong: the tourists. With the current lack of official statistics on the number of tourists that visit village, I wished to create a rough working estimate as a baseline for my research. To obtain this data, I would station myself on the main road in Cizhong near the church and take account of tourists that came and went. This number (which is provided in Appendix 2) is unfortunately too low given my lack of presence during most morning hours and several days where I was too busy to come to the church. However even this is helpful in corroborating estimates that I received from locals. Additionally, several informal interviews were conducted with tourists as they visited. Some questions asked were how they had heard about Cizhong and what had attracted them to the area. While this data is not presented in this paper, this information on what sorts of people came to the village was helpful in forming my analysis of the past and future development of tourism within the area.

Section 1: History of Tibetan Catholicism

Catholicism began to arrive in Tibet during the 16th and 17th centuries when the Vatican began to send Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries to the area to begin the process of converting the local population (Bray, 1995, p. 85). The priests faced heavy resistance from the Buddhist Lamas, however, who saw the Catholics as a threat to their theological and material dominance. In 1846, Pope Gregory XVI decided to assign a new group, the Paris Foreign Mission (Societe des Misionaries Entrangeres de Paris) to Tibet, because of their previous success in Sichaun province (Ibid, pg. 82). However, they too had to contend with the powerful Buddhist interest, and often were forced to do their work in secret, disguising themselves as merchants (Ibid, pg 86). In northwestern Yunnan, where the French missionaries (who were later joined by Swiss priests for the Order of the Grand St. Bernard) found themselves based because of the hostility faced in Tibet proper, they found more success. Along the Mekong and Nujiang rivers, they were able to convert many villages, including Cizhong.

The Cizhong Church was first built in 1867 in the nearby village of Cigu. However, this building was destroyed in 1905 during a widespread revolt by Tibetans against Christians (The Way to Tibet, 2004). The building was reconstructed in the neighboring village of Cizhong in 1911, where it stands today. It was during this time that the missionaries introduced grape cultivation and wine too, which is now a famous product of the region.

After almost a century of proselytizing, the foreign missionaries were deported in 1951 with the formation of the People's Republic of China and the rise of the Communist Party. This left the church in Cizhong with no priest, and lay religious leaders took responsibility for leading services using hymnals and catechisms that had been translated by the missionaries (The Way to Tibet, 2004). During the Cultural Revolution, the church was

damaged by members of the Red Guard, and the building was confiscated by the government to be used as a school and storage area (ibid). It was not until 1982 that the holy site, along with many other religious artifacts of the church, were returned to the people of Cizhong (ibid). However, the village remained without a priest until 2008, when the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association finally sent one to the area (Wong, 2012). After over 60 years, Masses finally resumed at the church. Despite the hardships of the past, the majority of the residents in Cizhong remain Catholic and live in harmony with the Buddhist minority within the village.

Section 2: Tourism

2.1: Shangri-la

Before discussing the growth of tourism in Cizhong, it is necessary to first look at preceding development within the region as a whole. Cizhong Village is one of many small villages that belong to Deqin County, which in turn is one of three counties that make up Diqing Prefecture. The other two counties are Shangri-la County and Weixi Lisu Autonomous County.

Starting in the 1960s, timber was the main industry of the prefecture, constituting 80% of the prefecture's GDP by the 1990s (Hillman 2003, pg. 175). However, a ban on logging was put into effect by the central government in 1998 following devastating flooding of the Yangzi River that was believed to be caused by deforestation upstream. With the largest industry in Diqing closed, many were left unemployed, and local governments lost about 80% of their revenue (ibid, pg. 186).

In order to recoup these losses, the Diqing government began to invest heavily in the development of the tourism industry within the prefecture. Infrastructure improvements were made to ease travel to the area, including the construction of paved roads and an airport in

Zhongdian. Great efforts were also made to enhance the Tibetan characteristics of the region. 7 million RMB was given to repair the Songtzanlin Monastery, the largest Buddhist monastery in the prefecture, and a law was passed that required all shop signs to be translated into Tibetan (ibid, pg. 176). New hotels, restaurants, and businesses sprang up to meet demand for this new industry.

The boldest, and most successful, move to increase tourism in the area was the changing of the name of Zhongdian to Shangri-la. The name comes from a fictitious Himalayan city in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. In the story, Shangri-la is depicted as a peaceful, utopian, paradise on earth, making it the perfect name to attract people to the city. After a multi-year campaign by the Zhongdian government to prove that they were the area that Hilton's novel was based off of, the name change was finally approved by the State Council in 2001 (ibid, pg. 175). Since that time, the city has become a large hub for ethnic tourism, where both Chinese and foreigners alike come to consume the 'exotic' Tibetan culture of the area. In 2010, the area received over 4.5 million visitors which contributed 4.618 billion yuan to the city's economy (Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, 2011). This overwhelming success has encouraged other local governments to increase their own tourism efforts in the hopes of replicating the results of Shangri-La.

2.2: Government Tourism Policies in Cizhong

In 1987, the Catholic Church in Cizhong was listed as a Key Protected Relic by the Yunnan Provincial Government (Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, n.d.). Though Cizhong was able to escape the drama of the Zhongdian/Shangri-la name switch of the late 1990s, a second cultural relic designation granted by the State Council in 2006 began to attract outside attention to the village. The government has catalyzed this process by actively inserting Cizhong in guidebooks and other tourist literature. On one particular Sunday, for

example, I witnessed a state sponsored film crew at a Mass in the village. They told me that footage they collected was to be used in a film to promote tourism throughout the Shangri-la/Deqin area, and that Cizhong was one of the few places selected (Subject 5). So far, these efforts to advertise the village have been rather successful. One shop owner, whose store was located in a prime location near the church, told me that on an average day he sees about ten tourists visiting the church, with particularly busy days bringing in over 40 (Subject 7). During the three weeks of this study, I observed over 100 people from all parts of the globe come to the holy building (See Appendix A).

With Cizhong now put on the map, officials have begun to draft more direct tourism policies. According to one informant, the government had made an offer to local leaders to set up a ticket office at the church and charge admission fees to visitors. The state would pocket 80% to 90% of the revenue, giving whatever paltry sum was left to the Church for repairs and other expenses. This offer was refused both because of the unequitable terms proposed, and also on the ethical grounds that no one should have to pay to come this holy place (Subject 8). For the time being at least, the church remains free to all those who come.

For all this activity, however, the Church and Tibetan Catholicism as a whole are still only a footnote to the main attraction of the area: Tibetan Buddhism. According to Lim, a scholar who has done extensive work in the Tibetan Catholic community,

“the Shangri-la area is heavily promoted by the tourism authorities as a mini-Tibet [which] means that the majority of government funding for religious purposes has been used for the renovation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, while the Tibetan Catholic churches [have] received very little, if any, government aid” (2009, pg. 92).

Indeed, one villager who is active in church affairs echoed this sentiment bemoaned the fact that the local government was giving so little money to a building that it was trying to make

money from (Subject 8). Instead, the church is reliant on donations to fund repairs for the aging building. Unfortunately, many of the regular attendees of the church are of little means and can only donate 10 to 15 yuan a week. Donations from tourists are, of course, graciously accepted, and according to Lim are a main source of church revenue (2009, pg. 93). However, I was not able to confirm this through my own study, and my observations would indicate that few visitors give money to the church during their visit. Even if there are several tourists that chose to donate large sums of money, this is neither a steady nor guaranteed source of income, which leaves the church in a less than desirable financial situation. Unless the incomes of its parishioners increase with the increase of tourism or wealthy donors become consistently attracted to the area, it is unlikely that the church will gain economically from the development that it largely has caused.

2.3 Economic Impact of Tourism in Cizhong

Though the church itself has not seen many monetary benefits from the increase in tourists, villagers in Cizhong have found several ways to capitalize on the opportunity tourism as presented to them. The most notable is wine production. As many locals proudly mention, the art of wine making was brought over by the French missionaries in the early 20th century. However, it was not until the late 1990s that this practice left the confines of the church vineyard and started to become a household business (The Way to Tibet, 2004).¹ Today, nearly all of the villagers that I talked with cultivate grapes for wine, and much of the land in Cizhong is dedicated to vineyards. The reason for this is lucrative nature of the wine produced. Within the village, a water bottle of wine (the local standard unit of measurement)

¹Prior to that time, the wine that was produced was primarily used for the Mass and the growth of grapes limited to the church yard. After the missionaries were expelled in 1951, and with the ensuing chaos of the Cultural Revolution, grape production ceased, and the grapes from the Church grew wild for decades. It was in 1998 that a lay leader of the church decided to take some of the grapes from the church vineyard and plant them for wine production, reinvigorating the process in the village (Way to Tibet, 2004).

sells for about 30 yuan, while 2.5 liters (the size of a small gas tank) can net 100 yuan. However, while some of the product is sold to the passing tourist, the majority of the wine produced is not sold within the village. Rather, many of the residents export their wine to larger cities such as Deqin (especially near Meili Snow Mountain), Dali, Lijiang, Shangri-la, and even as far as Kunming (Subject 1). It is in these larger cities that the maximum amount of profit can be made from the wine; the same 2.5 liter gas tank that sells for 100 RMB in the village can go from 200 to 300 RMB in larger areas (Subject 1). As more people become familiar with Cizhong through tourism literature, Cizhong wine as a brand will correspondingly increase in fame and desirability, making it even more profitable. This large potential for revenue, however, has not gone unnoticed by those on the outside of the village. The large Shangri-la wine company has begun to expand in the area, and some villagers have signed contracts to sell their grapes to the Company rather than making their own wine. (Galipeau 2013). The government has decided to aid in this process by providing grapes for the people to cultivate, though many think they are of inferior quality (Subject 2)². Given these large forces in play, it seems almost certain that the growing of grapes will continue to expand in the coming years.

Providing lodging to tourists and hikers is another common way for villagers to make some extra money. Many families rent out spare rooms in their house, which can earn them between 40 and 60 yuan a night. There are also several small hotels in the area that can accommodate visitors who find rural living to be unsuitable, even for a night. However, most of the observed tourists that came to Cizhong only stayed long enough to snap a few pictures

²For a deeper discussion on the issues that have accompanied grape cultivation and wine production in the Mekong River area, I recommend the works of Brendan Galipeau, including: *Dam-Induced Displacement and Agricultural Livelihoods in China's Mekong Basin*, as well as his yet to be published PhD dissertation on the subject.

in the church, and left within an hour. This means that the money made from running guesthouses or hotels is currently inconsistent, and only provides sporadic income.

The one major exception to this is the Songtsam Lodge, which opened its doors two years ago. The Lodge in Cizhong is one in a chain of five luxury hotels that are scattered across northwestern Yunnan. At a price of 1600 yuan per night, it promises to provide comfort and an experience of “genuine” local culture to those that can afford it. Thus far, this business strategy has been successful for the Cizhong Lodge, which sold 125 rooms during its inaugural year, with this year (its second in operation) on pace to sell many more (Subject 3). This likely makes the Songtsam one of the largest sources of outside funds coming into the village. This wealth helps the eleven employees that work there, seven of whom are local. All the Songtsam workers I talked with believed that they made decent enough money, despite the fact that they were required to live in dorms on the hotel property and grow most of their own produce (Subject 3). This limited number staff and self-sustenance policies mean that the hotel has only had a limited effect on the overall economy of Cizhong. However, the Songtsam is important in that it could be a harbinger of things to come, as increases in tourism lead to higher demand for high quality lodging.

Section 3: Development

3.1: Issues of Infrastructure

In an effort to make Cizhong more accessible to outsiders, the local government has invested a large sum of money in upgrading infrastructure in the area. The most noticeable to the casual observer is the new bridge that is in the process of being constructed. This will replace the old, somewhat rugged, suspension bridge that currently links Cizhong with the other bank of the Mekong. Having this new route is an undeniable improvement. While before it was necessary to both ascend and descend about 50 meters of dangerous curving

road on either side of the river, it will soon be possible to go straight from the highway (itself a new invention) to the village. This project has been relatively well received, and I did not hear any complaints about it during my study period. The most likely reason for this is the fact that this bridge is, both literally and figuratively, a two way street. While being built primarily with the goal of bringing tourists into Cizhong, the bridge also allows people from Cizhong easier access to the surrounding area. Shop owners and everyday citizens will soon have an easier time bringing in supplies for their stores and personal use. It also allows for wine to be exported more easily, which can greatly increase a villager's profit margin.

Unfortunately, the rest of the infrastructure policies have been more problematic. The highway on the other side of the Mekong River is one such example. The quick passage from Weixi to Deqin that it has provided to many travelers has come at the cost of environmental degradation. The sheer mountain face, prone to landslides even before construction, was further compromised by the heavy machinery work that went into building the road(Hinners, 2014).Today, the contrast between bare cliff face on that side of the river and the lush forest on the other bank speaks to the increased frequency of landslides caused by the road. In order to increase safety and avoid the issues of landslides in the future, tunnels are now being drilled through the mountains. Construction of these tunnels takes place 24/7 in order for the project to be completed by next year, and explosions could be heard periodically as the drilling commenced. Several locals complained to me about the noise this causes in their previously quiet and peaceful village (Subject 4).



Figure 1: Contrasting mountain faces show the damaging effects of construction

In Cizhong proper, new paved roads are also in the process of being built. Every day that I was in the village, about another ten to fifteen meters worth of cement was laid down and paved. This was often a source of frustration for the villagers as well as myself, as taking long detours through the terraced fields became necessary to avoid stepping in the wet cement. Additionally, the construction made it necessary for all electricity in the village to be shut off during the daylight hours, and would only return at the coming of dusk; at least on most days. On the nights when electricity did not return, which occurred about once every week during my research period, only those with gas powered generators would have power. This consisted of only a small minority of families in the area, as well as government officials. The rest would be left with flashlights and candles for the night.

For those that live farther away from the village center, the lack of electricity is compounded by a host of other issues related to the construction. In Cizhong proper the road was wide enough to simply pour concrete over. This is not the case on the dirt roads on the outskirts of the village, and the path had to be widened before the paving process could begin. To achieve the desired width, land near the road was confiscated from villagers and the

property leveled. For many, this not only included the destruction of century old trees, but, more importantly, the loss of highly valuable *putao di*, or vineyard land. Based on my own observations, two rows of grape plants were destroyed along the entire length of the new road, which went on for several miles. One row of grapes contained 40-60 vines, depending on how much land the family owned. Therefore, some families could lose as much as 120 plants to the construction. Though this number is by no means the majority of the grape plants these families own, it still hampers their long term ability to make the wine that is so vital in generating revenue. While the government did give compensation of 40 yuan per vine, one affected farmer that I talked to said that this compensation was completely insufficient to cover for the lost revenue that would have been produced throughout the lifetime of each plant (Monica).

To add insult to injury, the construction has also blocked the irrigation network in the area, making it impossible to move large amounts of water to these fields. While a new system will be built and running by the end of the year, this is too late to plant the crop that needs water the most: rice. Instead, less water intensive crops will be planted this year in order to compensate. Though only temporary, rice is a staple of many people's diets, and its loss for the year has only added to current frustrations. However, there is little recourse that villagers can take, and the most common response to the situation I heard was a resigned "*zenme ban?*" (what can we do?).

It should be noted that, among those whose land isn't effected, opinions towards the road were more positive. The shop owner I spoke with felt that the convenience of travel was a benefit to the people of Cizhong (subject 7). Once the roads are complete, navigation will be much easier within the village, and the wear and tear on vehicles of all sizes will be reduced. Additionally, the increased amount of tourists caused by the construction have some economic benefits, especially for those that have guesthouses around the church. However,

this is little consolation for those farther away from the village center that have been affected the most by this road construction.

3.2: Damming of the Mekong

The Mekong River (also known as the Lancang River in Chinese), is one of the waterways that has become a hub for hydropower development over the past decade. Across the five countries it traverses, numerous dams have been constructed to harness this power. Seven dams have been completed on the Chinese portion of the river alone, with six currently under construction (Hydropower in the Mekong River Basin, n.d.). One of those six sites is located several miles away from Cizhong, and is scheduled to be completed over the next two year. For these villagers, the “green” energy produced by this dam has extremely high costs that will have drastic and irreversible effects on the village.

The root of Cizhong’s troubles lie in the reservoir that will be created once the dam is complete. With the Mekong blocked, water levels will rise for several miles in the valley. While the residents of Cizhong live high enough from the water so that their houses will be safe from the rising water, farm land close to the banks of the river will not be spared. One woman, whose Christian name is Monica, told me that next year she will be losing one terrace level of land to the water, which another terrace being submerged the year after. For this, the government will provide compensation of 30,000 yuan for the first level, with the price of the second to be determined at a later date. As with the land confiscated the road, Monica felt that the funds provided by the government were inadequate. The reason for this dissatisfaction stems from the fact that fields near the river are exclusively used to plant sustenance crops such as corn. With the loss of this land, villagers who have fields close the Lancang will have less supply to feed themselves and their livestock.

The dam is also causing loss of land in other indirect, though far more dramatic, ways. Located several miles upstream from Cizhong lies another village that has the misfortune of being located below the waterline of the future reservoir. As in similar instances of property destruction due to the creation of hydroelectric facilities, the government has taken responsibility for the relocation of these villagers. Finding the relatively flat and spacious geography of Cizhong perfect for future development, and the authorities have decided to make this the new home of the 1,153 displaced villagers(茨中村宣传移民政策 , 2014). This will effectively double the village's population, which currently consists of 1108 people (茨中村, n.d.). In order to accommodate these new immigrants, houses are being built on land confiscated from Cizhong residents. Again, monetary compensation is given to those who are losing land, and a villager can expect to receive anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000 yuan per *mu*, based on their proximity to the Church (Monica).

Despite the somewhat larger sum of money some people are receiving, the numerous issues caused by this land grab (which will be further discussed in Section 4), have predictably caused local resentment that authorities have been trying to quell. Recently, officials from the Deqin government have been stationed in Cizhong to oversee the development process. Periodically, meetings are held in order to ensure the cooperation of the villagers. One informant with the baptismal name of Matthew recalled one meeting in which government officials repeatedly promised to protect the paddy fields of Cizhong. "Why would the fields need protection?" he rhetorically asked me, "They are fine just the way they are". Other propaganda has also gone up within the village to support the development within Cizhong, including a large sign atop the government building that encourages villagers to "Work hard and push forward to build a beautiful Cizhong" (my translation). These efforts have largely been ineffective in reducing dissatisfaction, however, and I often saw people

scoffing at the government's large billboard. However, villagers understand the precariousness of their situation, and active resistance to the policy has been nonexistent.



Figure 2: Propaganda billboard above the government building

Section 4: The Uncertain Future of Cizhong:

4.1: Economics

The rise of tourism and development has raised many questions about the future of Cizhong. Food security and resource allocation are perhaps the largest and most dramatic issues. As discussed in Section 3, cultivatable land is quickly disappearing in Cizhong due to flooding caused by the local dam project, as well as from the construction of new houses. Whatever is left after this destruction will then need to support twice as many people as it currently does, and ideally be divided between old residents and new immigrants. As of 2006, there is .86 *mu* of cultivatable land per person in Cizhong (茨中村, n.d.).³ After the population increase, this will plummet to .42 *mu* per person. Based on the current struggle to

³ One *mu* is approximately 1/6th of an acre.

make a living from this land, it is hard to imagine each family being able to grow enough to be self-sufficient. This issue is exacerbated by the choice of many villagers to plant grapes, which can make a far higher profit, over other edible crops. With the price of wine only expected to rise with the increase of tourism, it is unlikely that people will be willing to lose profits by converting vineyards to fields for other crops.

With farming not likely to meet the future needs of the people in Cizhong, the only option left will be for villagers to engage in other industries. Already, this process has begun among the youths of the village, who often leave Cizhong to find work in the larger towns of Deqin and Weixi (Subject 6). For those that have remained in the village, however, options are currently limited. Rather than providing decent, albeit temporary, employment, the recent construction in Cizhong has largely been outsourced to companies from Shangri-la and Dali. While the lack of skilled labor in the village may play a part in this, corruption also seems to play a significant role in creating this situation. According to several sources, the companies used for the Cizhong construction projects were selected based on either cronyism or the promise of kickbacks (subject 7). Since it takes a good deal of connections and means to achieve this, it is companies in larger cities that get the bid, and then bring in their own workers to complete the job. That being said, the few locals that the companies do hire can expect to make 100 yuan a day, which, relative to doing farm work, is decent money (Matthew).

The other economic opportunities available that do not rely on farming are those provided by the tourism industry. Indeed, this is the only industry that is expected to grow in Cizhong, and has the greatest potential to economically absorb the increase in population. New hotels, including the Songtsam and the less luxurious Dubai hotel, are going up rapidly around Cizhong. One business savvy villager, expecting high profits, has plans to sacrifice some of his vineyard space in order to build a new guesthouse with a scenic view (Matthew).

If current guesthouses can be renovated to meet the living standards of tourists, there is the potential to make a sizeable amount of money. However, the amount of capital necessary to start such endeavors can be prohibitively high for many people in the area. A likely scenario that could play out over the coming years is that outsiders from larger cities, who have access to more funds than rural people, will come in and set up their own businesses and hotels.

While locals will likely be hired there, such as at the Songtsam Lodge, their earnings would be small relative to the profits the owners make. Similarly, Cizhong residents may choose to rent their houses or land to outsiders to conduct business. With real estate prices rising in the area due to increased development according to one villager, it is possible that some villagers will opt to be landlords in order to make relatively easy cash(Subject). Lastly, the sale of handicrafts could be increasingly used as an income supplement. Already, many families make wooden bracelets in order to supplement their income. With the Catholic Church being the main attraction of the village, it is not inconceivable for a small industry selling Christian paraphernalia to emerge in time.

4.2: Religion

Assuming that the rise in tourism does occur as planned, it is not without a helping of irony. Currently, 80% of Cizhong's residents practice Roman Catholicism,(Galipeau, A Tibetan Christmas in Yunnan, 2015)⁴.However, this number will drastically change with the next two years as the relocation program begins to take effect. The vast majority of the 1,153 people who will be soon calling Cizhong their home are Tibetan Buddhist, and will be bringing their faith with them into the village. With the current population of Cizhong being 1,108, and only 80% being Catholic, simple arithmetic dictates that Christianity will become a

⁴ 80% seems to be the standard statistic used in every website, blog post, travel book, and documentary about Cizhong. However, I have yet to find an authoritative source, whether that be a scholarly article or government survey, that can confirm this. Though this figure seems to be somewhat dubious to me, I will treat it as accurate for the sake of creating a baseline in this study.

minority religion in the area, albeit a sizeable one. With the loss of its majority status, it is possible that the faith could weaken in the future, especially due to conversion through marriage. One villager I spoke to believed that a couple should be of one heart, and that if they were of different faiths, one would have to convert (Subject 2). Indeed, I saw several cases of women converting from Buddhism and taking Christian names upon getting married to Catholic men. I have also seen that this process can work in reverse, with one man describing how his father converted from Catholicism when he married his wife (Subject 1). With Buddhism becoming the majority, it seems likely that the amount converting from Catholicism will outnumber those converting to it. However, younger villagers seemed less concerned about this than older members of the community. One man I met who was in his thirties explained to me how, though he was Buddhist, he did not care that his wife chose to keep her Catholic faith and was fine letting his children pick one religion or the other (Subject 7).

While this mixed household situation is rather rare, it could be representative of decreased adherence towards religious traditions by the village's youth. The majority of attendees at the Masses I participated in were elderly, especially on the nightly Masses. The absence of the younger generation in the Catholic Church is highly concerning, since their interest and participation in the religion is essential to its propagation in the future. One young woman by the name of Helen explained this absenteeism by saying that young people are either busy working in the fields, or are outside the village going to school or have found jobs in other cities. Herself a college student, Helen believed that many of her peers keep their faith, even if they are in different areas and unable to attend Mass. Other disagree, and one man told me that, even if young people weren't busy, they still would not come to church or be active in religious life (Subject 8). A possible negotiation between these two contradictory stances can be seen in the work of Lim, who describes Catholicism in Tibetan communities

as an “ascribed status”, meaning it is something that most people are born or married into(2009, pg. 114). The result is something similar to what is called ‘cultural Catholicism’ in the US. These are people that identify as Catholic, but only participate in religious activities in a minimal way, and may not subscribe to certain religious doctrines of the Church. If such is the case, Catholicism could become more of a passive status in Cizhong. While tourism will provide some incentive to keep some Catholic aspects, such as the maintenance of the church, it remains to be seen whether the religion will continue to thrive at the individual level in the future.

Conclusion

Cizhong is currently sitting at an important juncture in its history. Tourism, which has been slowly increasing over the past decade, is about to rise dramatically due to infrastructure improvements and the government's active promotion of the area in tourism literature and media. These policies have caused many issues in Cizhong, most notably the confiscation and destruction of people's land for the purposes of building roads. However, tourism also has the potential to create numerous economic benefits for the residents of Cizhong, including opportunities in the hotel and guesthouse industry, as well as through the promotion of their wine.

It is the magnitude of these material benefits that will largely determine the fate of Cizhong. Over 1000 are people being relocated to Cizhong as a result of a nearby dam. This will put an extreme amount of strain on the limited agricultural resources of the village, and it is likely that farming in itself will become insufficient to provide for the needs of the village. It is only through the growth of the tourism industry that Cizhong residents will be able to provide a living for themselves in the future. The irony of this is that Roman Catholicism, the main aspect that brings visitors from around the world to this otherwise average village, will no longer be the majority religion after relocation occurs. In the future, when tourists come to gaze upon the aged stone pillars of the village church, they will be seeing a symbol what of Cizhong once was; a past which, like the missionaries who erected the holy building, is never to return to Cizhong.

Future Research

In providing this descriptive picture of Cizhong at the point where its tourism is about to take off, I have provided researchers with the necessary tools to track the development of this village. Future studies can compare the predictions and speculations made in this paper with the reality of what happens in the future. Additionally, information from this study can be used more broadly to understand development throughout rural China. With the Chinese government doubling down on its investments in hydropower, more villages will inevitably be relocated in the process. Though this process is well known and oft-studied, Cizhong provides the novel aspects of Catholic faith and a growing tourism industry that other villages do not possess, thereby providing new avenues of analysis.

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Interview Table

Informant Alias	Gender	Occupation	Age Range
Subject 1	Male	Retired	60-70
Subject 2	Females	Farmer	30-40
Subject 3	Male	Hotel Worker	20-30
Subject 4	Female	N/A	30-40
Subject 5	Male	Cameraman	25-35
Subject 6	Male	Retired	70-80
Subject 7	Male	Store Owner	30-40
Subject 8	Male	N/A	50-60
Helen	Females	Student	20-30
Matthew	Male	Farmer	40-50
Monica	Female	Farmer	30-40

Appendices

Appendix A

Tourist Count

Day 1: 1 American
Day 2: 2 Americans
Day 3: 4 Chinese (Dali), 2 Swedish
Day 4: 0
Day 5: 4 French
Day 6: 6-7 Chinese
Day 7: 0
Day 8: 3 American, 2 Chinese (Kunming)
Day 9: 8 Chinese
Day 10: 3 Chinese
Day 11: 15 Chinese
Day 12: 10 Chinese
Day 13-16: n/a
Day 17: 2 English, 4 Chinese
Day 18: 5 Holland, 35 Chinese
Day 19-21: n/a
Total: 107 (19 foreign, 88 domestic)

Appendix B

Subjective Account:

As a Catholic, one of the most rewarding things that I got to do on this ISP was participate in the religious life of Cizhong. Something that fascinates me about Catholicism is how it is both universal yet local. What I mean by this is that the order and ritual of the Mass are the same no matter where you go in the world. Though Cizhong is on the completely opposite side of the planet from my home, I was able to understand what was going on. This gave me an incredible sense of kinship and connection that greatly eased my transition into village life. On the other hand, because the Catholic faith is so large (1.1 billion people), each country adds their own little twists to the religion. For Cizhong, this was largely the chanting that preceded mass. Going to the evening Masses and learning to chant the Rosary in Tibetan was a fascinating and spiritually fulfilling experience that I am extremely blessed to have had.

Making connections outside the church was also a fantastic experience. After the first few days of me wondering around the village, people began to realize that I simply wasn't a tourist. They started asking me where I was going, and would often invite me to dinner or to have a drink. It is through encounters like these that I made some of my closest friends in the village: people that I hope to see again in the future. This was a great contrast from the first time I was in the village when I felt a great sense of loneliness. I believe that staying longer helped me develop a better sense of community and made Cizhong feel more like home.

That being said, there were definitely challenges during this ISP. Sanitation in Cizhong left much to be desired, and I did get a little bit of stomach trouble during that time. The lack of electricity was also great inconvenience, and prevented me from doing work at

times. With regard to the actual study, however, the largest challenge was subtle finding ways of asking people about the dam and relocation. It is a sensitive topic that I couldn't simply ask out of the blue; it was something that had to be worked up to. As a natural introvert, this made it twice as hard, since I am much better at listening than talking. However, I believe that working through all of these problems has made me a stronger person, and I am so happy that I chose to go to this place rather than stay in Kunming.