Exploring Place: How Independent Tourism is Changing the Politics of Geographic Knowledge in China

Travis Klingberg

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/geog_gradetds

Part of the Asian Studies Commons, and the Human Geography Commons

Recommended Citation


Geography Graduate Theses & Dissertations. 74.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/geog_gradetds/74
Exploring place: how independent tourism is changing the politics of geographic knowledge in China

by

Travis Klingberg

BA, North Park University, 1997
MA, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography

2014
This thesis entitled:
Exploring place: how independent tourism is changing the politics of geographic knowledge in China
written by Travis Klingberg
has been approved for the Department of Geography

________________________________________
Dr. Tim Oakes

________________________________________
Dr. Emily Yeh

Date __________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol #0609.19
Klingberg, Travis (PhD, Geography)

Exploring place: how independent tourism is changing
the politics of geographic knowledge in China

Thesis directed by  Dr. Tim Oakes

Since its resurgence in the early 1990s, domestic tourism in China has increasingly taken the form of self-organized leisure travel between urban and rural or remote areas. From suburban day trips in private cars to extended backpack travel across western China, independent tourism has become entangled with place, with new desires for cultural and natural destinations, new placemaking projects, and new kinds of tourist experiences in the city and countryside. This dissertation approaches these changes as a national turn to exploring place, a dialectical relationship between the production of tourist places that encourage commodified forms of exploration, and new desires for experiencing place through practical, bodily encounters. This dissertation argues that through exploring place, China’s independent tourists have become engaged in a new politics of geographic knowledge production that is vital in sustaining the national geo-body. As more Chinese have traveled to more parts of the country than ever before, the production of geographic knowledge has expanded from a state and elite project to one that includes the knowledge practices of ordinary Chinese. The state has employed tourism as part of a territorial project of governance, and Chinese tourists themselves have generated new knowledge of place that, while it may not directly confront the state, can expose gaps and discontinuities in the dominant order. This dissertation is an ethnographic field study based in Sichuan Province – in the urban and periurban landscapes of the provincial capital (Chengdu); in the rural, natural landscape of a remote, protected area (Yading Nature Reserve); and in tourist encounters that are at the center of exploring place in China.
To my parents.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support and the generosity that made this dissertation possible. Thanks, first of all, to the participants for sharing a part of their world, to the many people I interviewed for their insights, and to those I got to know in Yading and Daocheng who, despite an annual barrage of tourists, welcomed one more bearing questions.

Thanks to everyone who helped at various stages of my research and writing: Xiao Bian’r, Chen Bo, Orianna Cacchione, Matt Forney, Fan Ke, Liu Rui, Mindi Schneider, Helen Wu, Tang Yun, Zhang Huiping, Zhang Yuan, and many others. I thank Li Zhiyong at Sichuan University for his support during my time in Chengdu, the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad program for funding my field research, and the Department of Geography at the University of Colorado at Boulder for funding my writing through the Gilbert F. White Doctoral Fellowship in Geography.

Daniel Buck, Chris Coggins, Stevan Harrell, and Michael Hathaway read and provided valuable comments on early versions of individual chapters. Najeeb Jan opened a path for thinking at a decisive moment. Michael Meyer provided essential advice on craftsmanship and the encouragement to push through. I’m grateful for the guidance, critical comments, and encouragement of my PhD committee members, Elizabeth Dunn, Carla Jones, Ralph Litzinger, and Emily Yeh. Each of them has shaped my thinking in significant ways. And I am indebted to Tim Oakes, chair, supervisor, mentor, and friend, who made this dissertation and the many years that led to it better at every turn. Ten thousand thanks.

Finally, my love and gratitude to Bertie Bi, for the many small things along the way, and for patiently granting me time to write while juggling her own work and our little Theo.
Contents

List of Figures vii

List of Tables viii

1 The most beautiful place
   The geo-body past ................................................. 11
   The geo-body present ........................................... 18
   The research project .......................................... 23

2 The age of independent tourism
   The tourism revival ............................................ 39
   Mindless masses? ............................................... 46
   The age of independent tourism ......................... 56
   Ordering exploration ......................................... 77

3 The production of explorable place
   Spatial change in post-reform China ..................... 94
   Making places for tourism .................................. 107
   Making places for exploring .............................. 114
   Explorable place ............................................. 121
   A geography of exploring .................................. 130

4 Exploring place
   Knowing enframed ............................................. 150
   Knowing implaced ............................................ 162
   The place of knowledge ..................................... 170

5 A routine discovery
   Exploration I .................................................. 182
   Exploration II ................................................ 186
   Exploration III ............................................... 192
   Knowing Shangrila, knowing the nation .............. 196
6 The new politics of geographic knowledge ........................................... 203
   From elite to ordinary knowledge .............................................................. 211
   Tourism as territorialization ................................................................. 219
   Place on the borderlands ........................................................................ 225
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 231

List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Luorong Pasture and Jambeyang, Yading Nature Reserve scenic area. <em>Chinese National Geography</em>, July 2004.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research sites: Chengdu, Daocheng, and Yading.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deng Xiaoping on Huangshan, July 1979.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Angry giants: tourists “storming” Jiuzhaigou.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I’m still hungry!” (editorial cartoon).</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Choices along the western Sichuan tourism loop. Road sign, Kangding.(Author photo.)</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The “Western Sichuan Tourism Loop,” Ganzi Prefecture (Kangding at center of lower third).</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>East Chengdu Music Park, architectural rendering. (Promotional material, c.2011).</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Deng Xiaoping and family at Splendid China, Shenzhen, January 1992.</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Themed spaces (or explorable places?): <em>Urban China</em>, April 2012.</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pingle placemaking 1: “ancient-style” street (author photo).</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Pingle placemaking 2: Pingsha Luoyan (author photo).</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pingle “Golden Rooster Valley Exploration Map” (promotional material).</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do not climb. Daocheng Snow Mountain Square (author photo).</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>“The Long Corridor of Mani Stones” (author photo).</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Yading Nature Reserve scenic area scale model (author photo).</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The found horizon: the Konka Risumgongba. From left, Jambeyang, Shenrezig, and Chanadorje. Joseph Rock. (National Geographic Society.)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

1. Chengdu’s “New Ten Sites” .......................................................... 129
The most beautiful place

“This place is ugly,” said a woman stepping through the door, back from a visit to Drolma Lake. “There’s nothing to see here.”

A man sitting across the room had visited the lake the previous day. He didn’t think much of it, either: Instead of going back to see more of the scenic area, he hadn’t left the guesthouse. He sat tapping at a video game on his laptop. “A lot of people seem to be disappointed here,” I said to him. He looked up for the first time. “Exactly! I really am disappointed,” he said, “I thought the scenery would be better. And I’m not in good shape. Walking here is painful.”

In September, harsh alpine conditions – low temperatures, wind, occasional hail and lightning – left many tourists in the Yading Nature Reserve hypothermic and the late monsoon rains had turned the trails to mud deep enough to pull the shoe off a tourist’s foot. The famous mountain peaks didn’t appear for many days, leaving visitors who had come so far for views of sunlit summits with glum photos of rockfall and mist. Huffing as he struggled uphill through the mud, one tourist from Hunan, a southern province known for its karst landscapes, muttered that the scenery back home was better.

Sandwiched between those cloudy days of complaint was a morning that rivaled the best of autumn, one that happened to fall on October 1, the 61st anniversary of the founding of the
People’s Republic of China (PRC) and one of the biggest holidays of the year. Yading Village – thirty traditional Tibetan homes and barley fields perched above a valley – is bisected by a hook-shaped road, a smooth curve along the uphill side, a right angle at the center of the village, and a straight line downhill. In the half light the acrid smoke of burning cypress announced dawn, rising from home altars in cloud-like puffs set against a clear sky. A dull clang of bells passed, horses saddled for the day’s work of carrying tourists into the scenic area. The imposing silhouettes of ridges and peaks became a crystalline, panoramic view. And on that National Day, since the restrictions on allowing private vehicles enter the nature reserve had been lifted, a stream of sedans, SUVs, and minivans rolled into the village along with the dawn.

Just past seven, with most of the village’s Tibetan residents and seasonal Han staff already preparing for the day’s tourism, the sun peaked over an eastern ridge to shine on the face of Shenrezig, the bodhisattva of compassion, and highlight the shoulder of Chanadordje, the bodhisattva of power.¹ The tourists were ready. Bodies brightly clad in waterproof-breathable nylon tumbled out of guesthouses turned to face the sun and the valley below. Thermoses and cameras hung at their sides, sometimes along with a child or a Pekinese. They made quiet sounds of anticipation – the tapping of trekking poles on stone, the click-whir of cameras, the swish of new outdoor gear, low whispers. Then came the blast of an air horn from a twenty-two-person bus careening into the village. It stopped, tourists packed in, windows fogged, doors closed, and it continued shrieking downhill. Descending 650 feet through six long switchbacks, the bus passed barley fields and guesthouses and finally came to rest at the trailhead of the Yading scenic area.

¹In general I use Tibetan names to refer the three sacred mountains in Yading, following Joseph Rock’s (1931) transliterations (see Chapter Five). However, when referring to the mountains as part of China’s official tourism geography, I occasionally use the Chinese names in pinyin. For reference, the peaks are Shenrezig (Xiannairi, 仙乃日), Jambeyang (Yangmairong, 央迈勇), and Chanadordje (Xianuoduoji, 夏诺多吉).
During the holiday, the number of daily visitors jumped from a few hundred to a few thousand. Most of them, upon arrival at the trailhead, turned uphill, looking past the ridges for a glimpse of a mountain peak. Some tarried in the makeshift shops that sold boiled eggs, rain ponchos, plaid sun hats, saddle blankets, and stirrups. Some gathered in circles to consult travel information they’d brought. Everyone, once oriented, headed up the valley, splitting off to queue for a guide and a horse, or to walk on their own. Few bothered to read the wooden sign that explained what lay further up the valley, what they’d all come so far to see:

*The Brief Introduction of Yading*²

[The] Yading scenic area is located in Daocheng County, Ganzi Tibetan Prefecture, Sichuan province. It is known as ‘the soul of Shangri-La,’ because it is located at the centre of Shangri-La’s Eco-tourism, and is a provincial and national-level nature reserve. It was listed as the Man and Biosphere Nature Reserves by UNESCO in 2003, and the three snow-capped peaks of Yading were praised as one of the ten famous mountain ranges in China in 2005.

Yading also was chosen as one of the most beautiful places in China. With its combination of magnificent highland ecology, peculiar glacier physiognomy, strong Tibetan Buddhism and colorful customs of Kangba show all of Shangri-La’s characteristics of ‘calm, peace, purity, and mystery,’ Yading has been kept as the most complete and pristine natural ecosystem in the country.

Not everyone finds Yading disappointing. In July 2004, *Chinese National Geography* (CNG), China’s top popular geography magazine, featured Yading on the cover of a special issue titled “Greater Shangrila: Encircling China’s most beautiful places” (Figure 1). The story told of

---

²Instead of retranslating the Chinese I’ve transcribed the existing English translations of this and other multilingual signs. While this isn’t representative of the quality of the Chinese texts, it provides a sense of the official discourse that frames Yading as a tourism geography.
the Greater Shangrila Ecotourism Region, an interprovincial tourism and biodiversity conservation area encompassing parts of Sichuan, Qinghai, Tibet, and Yunnan. The cover text included scholarly perspectives reflecting the magazine’s roots as an academic journal:

Geographers say: Here is the antithesis of China’s traditional topography.³

Anthropologists say: Here is a migratory corridor for China’s ethnic groups.

Stacked above these lines was an even more telling comment about what Greater Shangrila – symbolized by Yading – meant for China:

Backpackers say: Here every kilometer is wonderful.

Figure 1: Luorong Pasture and Jambeyang, Yading Nature Reserve scenic area. Chinese National Geography, July 2004.

³In cases where no English translation exists, translations of Chinese language materials are my own.
Located in an area once infamous for its impenetrability and its outlaws, Yading has become a symbol of national beauty, biodiversity conservation, Tibetan Buddhism, the cultures of Eastern Tibet, and the “soul” of Shangrila. This out of the way place, many hours of rough overland travel from cities and in most ways left behind by the urban economic boom, has in the span of two decades been drawn into the center of the nation. This in a paradoxical time when Tibet – and other ethnic autonomous areas in China – have risen to national attention as regions said to threaten the national order. The appearance of pristine beauty in China’s ethnic borderlands over the past two decades happened not simply because state officials, scholars, or magazine editors positioned Yading as a symbolic part of the national experience. It has also happened because growing numbers of domestic tourists have traveled there, thus drawing Yading into the shared practical knowledge of China’s national territory. And as the tourists who had been disappointed in that scenery pointed out, the ways that Yading is inscribed in China’s national imagination does not always match up with the lived experience of the place.

Most visitors I observed arriving at the “The Brief Introduction” sign ignored it. They were preoccupied with more important things: Which direction to walk? Might it rain? Will one bottle of water be enough? How long does it take to get to the high lakes? Is there still time to hire a horse? Even by the end of the day, some couldn’t even name the famed mountains they’d come to see. For all the previously inscribed knowledge about Yading – the cover stories, photo collections and interpretive signage – what most seemed to govern the actual experience of the nature reserve was the bodily experience: the long queues and uphill climbs, the spartan facilities, the mercurial weather conditions, the elevation, the warmth of sunlight in a sheltered place or the sting of freezing rain on the face. While not nearly as legible or symbolically influential as representations of Yading, these tourist experiences are formative of another kind of knowledge, the lived, practical knowledge of place. These experiences are formative of
collective knowledge about China’s national geo-body that is unprecedented, and by its nature different from the knowledge inscribed by state and national elites.

Over twenty years ago, amid Deng Xiaoping’s calls to speed economic reform was a directive to build a domestic tourism industry (lùyóuyè 旅游业, lùyóu shìyè 旅游事业) (Xiao 2006). Since then, according to official statistics, domestic tourism grew even faster than the national economy, with tourism receipts regularly topping 15 percent year-on-year growth and some years topping 30 percent (Liu 2002, 103). The desire for tourist experiences has become such a naturalized part of Chinese life that is has outgrown the capabilities of package tourism as envisioned by the central government. While Chinese tourism in the minds of many foreign observers still brings to mind flag-carrying tour guides and matching tourist hats, “independent” tourism (zìzhǔ lùyóu, 自助旅游, zìzhǔ lǚxíng 自助旅行) – self-organized travel that minimizes or obviates the need for tourism experts – has expanded from a small scale leisure activity of enthusiasts in the 1990s to a broadly popular activity in the 2000s (Klingberg 2007; Xiao 2011).

China’s tourism industry has over much of its reform era history been standardized and systematized, like other centrally planned and managed projects. This lead to an intensive package tourism geography constituted by a national transportation infrastructure, nationally-rated tourist sites, nationally-rated hotels, nationally-rated travel agencies, and a network of scenic spots with central state credentials and ratings (see Nyiri 2005). Independent tourism developed in part because the reform-era renewal of the tourism industry built an infrastructure for tourism and helped make tourism a desirable activity for Chinese on the mainland. However, while independent tourism often overlaps with package tourism, China’s domestic tourists began seeking experiences that group tours to conventional tourist sites could
not provide. The countryside and remote areas in China have become increasingly desirable tourism destinations that offer different tourism experiences than conventional sites built specifically for tourism.

Since the early 1990s, independent tourism in the PRC changed from being a marginal activity to being a naturalized and highly desirable part of contemporary life for many Chinese, particularly the urban middle class who possess the leisure time and disposable income to act on those desires. Far from being a phenomenon peripheral to or simply resulting from China’s significant social and economic changes, domestic tourism is an activity at the center of contemporary life, both for the state, which relies on it economically (4 percent of national GDP, and over 10 percent of some provincial GDPs), and for Chinese people whose interest in new places and traveling to them has become an ordinary part of life (Klingberg and Oakes 2012). Tourism and place have been entangled as never before in China, and through this entanglement tourism has become a central part of ordering social life in China.

It has been argued that China’s periphery – both the areas outside the PRC’s national borders (Tu 1991) and the ethnic borderlands within (Harrell 1999; Cartier and Oakes 2010) – has been central to making and sustaining the nation. Paradoxically, China’s borderlands have been central spaces, where the coherence of the national geo-body has been worked out (Oakes 2012, 317). The question of how a nation knows its territory is fundamentally a question of what practices it employs to know itself, how new spatial practices remake relationships between places, producing greater distance between some places (Chio 2008) and bringing other places close (Flower 2004).
Peripheral places such as Yading are central to knowing the national geo-body because they are places where new skills of knowing the nation are applied, practiced, and shared. Taking the Yading Nature Reserve as an instructive case, we can see in the rise of self-researched, self-organized travel the development of new desires and skills for knowing the nation, of practices that bind tourists and places, and that drive geographic changes, from revitalizing inner cities for tourism to developing remote areas into premier tourism sites.

As tourism in general – and independent tourism in particular – targets new places, and as more places are remade for tourism, the practices of China’s tourists have become increasingly important in the generation and transmission of geographic knowledge. This national knowledge is of course embedded in a “top-down” nation-making project by state and national elites. However, tourism is not simply another practice of formal nationalism (Eriksen 1993), as if the state’s vision of the nation could be simply mirrored in the travels of its citizens. Rather, tourism – especially tourism that eschews the state-envisioned experience – should be recognized as a “bottom-up” project of informal nationalism (Billig 1995; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). This is particularly relevant in contemporary China, where independent tourism to peripheral places has become a national desire. Moreover, as domestic tourism became an exemplary, naturalized part of contemporary life (Klingberg and Oakes 2012), these skills of knowing the nation have found a home at the center.

This dissertation argues that through exploring place, China’s independent tourists have become engaged in a new politics of geographic knowledge production that is integral to sustaining the national geo-body. Central to this discussion is the notion of tourism as an ordering (Franklin 2004), a way of approaching tourism as an ongoing, dynamic process rather than an established, overarching structure for human action. Instead of privileging the state tourism system as the defining mode of tourism in China, this dissertation approaches the
apparent stability of that system as itself a product of ordering effects, which the state has a
great interest in establishing and preserving. However, implicit in this approach is the fact that
any social ordering is only partial, and requires constant attention to keep order and avoid
disorder. What this means for tourism in China is that we should consider both the revival of
tourism in the reform era (with domestic tourism emerging in the 1990s) and the rise of
independent tourism as changes that had to be made. None of these changes were “natural” side
effects of economic reform or globalization; they were produced by the ordering influences of
the state, private enterprise, and tourists themselves, and they are constantly re-ordered
through the same process.

One of the significant changes brought with the age of independent tourism is the
reordering of geographic knowledge, which has revalued both the kinds of knowledge produced
through tourism and the acts that go into producing that knowledge. In addition to ongoing
state inscriptions of geographic knowledge, we can see through the rise of independent tourism
new knowledge practices that have put new value on the practical, bodily knowledge of place.
Shifting the value of geographic knowledge from state and elite productions to include that of
peer-produced travel information has had political ramifications on the ways that China is
thought and known as a territory. No longer at stake is the creation of a Chinese geo-body
recognizable to the nation, but rather the sustaining of China’s geo-body, which requires
ongoing ordering that requires practices of practical, bodily knowledge by ordinary people
exploring a national territory.

While exploration is often framed as coming to know the unknown (see Wright 1947), I am
not writing about exploration as an imperial enterprise (Driver 1992), as the specialized domain
of experts (see Lévi-Strauss 2012), or as a way to understand tourism per se (see Cohen 1972). Instead, I approach exploration as a place-based experience fundamental to geographic knowledge, a practice as integral to everyday life in familiar places as it is to knowing a new place. Exploring place encompasses explicit practices of geographic knowing, such as mapping, GPS usage, and route-finding as well as implicit practices such as seeing and walking. I am interested in the ways that “discovering” the unknown through a tourist experience has become an ordinary part of day-to-day life in a globally connected and technologically mediated nation. Exploring place is, in other words, a practice of knowing place that is important to the life of a nation to the extent that it becomes a shared national experience. Independent tourism, the focus of this research, reflects a national turn to exploring place and is a particularly emblematic case.

Exploring place also provides a thematic framework for this research. It can be thought of as an alternative approach to the study of tourism in China, one that moves beyond state-centered analyses of tourism (Nyíri 2005; Kolás 2008), and that expands on the discussion of local impacts and responses to tourism (Oakes 1998; Oakes 2006). Exploring place puts an emphasis on actual tourists in practice, an element often absent or ignored from studies of tourism in China (see Chio 2014), and that reveals how tourists are an active part in the ordering effects of tourism. Exploring place is a framework for thinking through the dialectical relationship between the production of place and the place-based nature of human experience. It addresses both the phenomenological experience and the political-economic context of tourism, since both are fundamental to the political question of the national geo-body.

As domestic tourism became an economic priority of the state and a desirable leisure practice for Chinese, it became more closely tied to the dramatic transformation of place in China. New placemaking strategies have produced what I call *explorable places*, places that
encourage commodified forms of exploration, often blending touristic and everyday activities. In contrast to bounded scenic spots built especially for tourist experiences (Nyíri 2005), tourism development in China has increasingly capitalized on local heritage and topography to create unique experiences that blend touristic and everyday experiences.

Concurrently with the production of new places for exploration, Chinese have taken to new ways of spending leisure time that involve a new bodily orientation to place. As tourism has become increasingly entangled with the economic future of places across China, the practice of tourism has changed, shifting from standardized experiences in bounded tourist spaces to diversified, self-organized experiences. The desires and practices of tourists themselves – real bodies in real places (see Minca and Oakes 2011) – are as never before at the center of how places in China are known. The new experiences implicit in independent tourism have generated collectively-shared propositional knowledge retained in texts, images, and maps, as well as practical knowledge retained in the very bodies of Chinese traveling the nation. This practical knowledge is the basis for a new politics of geographic knowledge production that while not necessarily challenging the state order provides the ground for new national knowledge that stands apart from the generalized, abstracted discourses of the state.

The geo-body past

Thongchai Winichakul coined the term “geo-body” in his 1994 book Siam Mapped. In its original form, the geo-body was meant to describe the workings of a political technology through which a nation recognizes its territory. This is different from a longer arc of theory on nationalism that, while treating territory as centrally important, does not work out exactly how or why territory is important (Penrose 2002), or clarify what specific histories and geographies make the idea of territory possible (Elden 2010a).
Thongchai’s goal was to recover the specific history of the making of modern Thailand in order to illuminate the historical rupture that displaced an earlier mode of spatial knowing with new practices of cartography and calculation (1994, 16). He wrote,

A history of the geo-body...is not a chronological description of boundary demarcations and the events which led to the making of [a] map. Rather, [it] is a vivid example of [how] different kinds of geographic knowledge coexisted, collided, and were finally displaced. ... The outcome of the confrontation was a totally new way of thinking and perceiving space, and the emergence of a new kind of territoriality (ibid., 56, 36).

Thongchai’s fundamental interest in the geo-body concept is a political history of the practices that go into knowing the earth in such a way that a nation emerges. He focuses on the ways new maps of Siam gave rise to a new national knowledge of modern Thailand, how the knowledge of nationhood arises first and most powerfully from the creation of a nation-on-the-map (ibid., 17). At its core, the geo-body is a conceptual aid to understanding how national space and national boundaries are possible (an epistemological and ontological question), as opposed to how a particular set of boundaries are made (a descriptive historical question). The distinction is subtle, but important.

There are two essential points to Thongchai’s conception of the geo-body: First, while mapping is a “prime technology” of producing the geo-body, the geo-body corresponds neither to a map, nor to the physical boundaries of the nation (ibid., 16–17). The geo-body is not a territory in the conventional sense of a predefined, bounded space whose existence is taken as a truth that can be represented through technologies such as cartography. It is, rather, the product of a specific history and a specific set of knowledge practices. Techniques of
navigation, surveying, and mapping – the technologies that generate territory – do not represent a geo-body so much as they generate a geo-body.

Second, the geo-body is a political rationality of governing, a spatial epistemology expressed through a specific form (Rose 2004, 26–27). Any particular geo-body has a specific political existence, produced through competing knowledge practices and resulting in a naturalized – and transparently hegemonic – conception of national space. We can understand Thongchai’s geo-body as “a distinctive mode of social/spatial organization” (Elden 2010a, 810): The geo-body is a way of knowing and ordering knowledge about a nation. It should not be mistaken for a particular thing – a map or a physical boundary – but should bring to mind a set of knowledge practices that make territory possible.

Thongchai’s concept of a national geo-body has been a point of reference for scholars studying the production of China’s national territory. One of the earliest references of the geo-body in China raised the question of what the Chinese geo-body meant for those who are “less authentic, more peripheral, and farther removed from a core Chinese tradition” (Gladney 1998, 5). Where Thongchai was concerned with the production of a dominant national geo-body by the state and other elite agents, this early reference framed the question of China’s geo-body as a subaltern politics (Gladney 1998; Gladney 2004). Many scholars working at the time shared a concern with the role of China’s ethnic minorities in China’s contemporary nationhood, for example Litzinger (2000) on the Yao and Bulag (2002) on the Mongols. This work explored the ways that China’s ethnic populations have been territorialized in a Han national geography, not only as subjects of a hegemonic national vision, but also as knowledge-making groups that have affected that national conception. However, the geo-body analytic has for the most part been a
footnote in this work, and the actual spatial practices of non-state groups, including ethnic minorities, in making the geo-body still deserves greater attention. With the focus on “ordinary” tourists, this dissertation lays out an approach that could be extended to other non-state/non-elite groups.

One of the first extended engagements with the geo-body in the Chinese context is James Leibold’s work (2007), which traced the changing ideas of nationhood through China’s transition from empire to modern state. Leibold was interested in how a modern sense of “Chineseness” was generated through the discourse of a unified Chinese nation (Zhonghua minzu, 中华民族), and how “mapping, colonizing, and politically incorporating” China’s frontier became a central issue in creating a unified national identity (Leibold 2007, 1, 3). Like Thongchai, Leibold was interested in denaturalizing – or “de-centering” (ibid., 3) – the apparently timeless conception of the modern Chinese nation. However, rather than focusing on the role of maps and mapmaking in creating a national idea, Leibold focused on the discourse of Chinese and foreign ideas about race and nation as the key site of nation making. While he intended to follow Thongchai’s conception of the geo-body (ibid., 1n8), Leibold’s interest was in the “discursive terrain” of modern Chinese nationhood, in the terms and concepts that shaped a Chinese version of modernity (ibid., 8). In other words, what is at stake in Leibold’s analysis is not the creation of a territorial idea (as was the case with Thongchai), but the creation of a new multiethnic national subject that could be used to shore up an imperiled national territory (see Billé 2014).

While there is resonance between Leibold’s and Thongchai’s projects, it is important to point out the different uses of the term geo-body. Leibold was making a similarly constructivist argument about the modern Chinese nation, though unlike Thongchai, he identified a change in political discourse without engaging the change in spatial epistemology that the shift from
empire to nation demanded. Thongchai was clear that his concern with the geo-body was not a
“political or economic history of the transition from a premodern empire to a modern
nation-state” (1994, 16). Leibold’s use of the geo-body was closer to a synonym for “national
territory” than an analytical framework: he referred to the geo-body as the “territorial entity” of
historic China within which China’s many ethnic groups live (2006, 182), as a territorial
integrity “beset on all sides by stronger foreign powers” (ibid., 45), and he observed that
nation-making projects – particularly in the Republican era – sought to “secure Chinese
soverignty over the Qing geo-body” (ibid., 53). This is a minor criticism in terms of Leibold’s
work overall, though it highlights a common slippage in use of the geo-body concept I wish to
avoid.

William Callahan (2009) applies Thongchai’s ideas with greater fidelity than other China
scholars and does the most to adapt the concept to China’s contemporary situation. Callahan
argues against the idea that an unbounded imperial domain was replaced in the Republican era
by the concept of China as a bounded sovereign territory (ibid., 146). This challenges Leibold’s
argument that China’s geo-body was bounded through the conversion of fluid imperial
boundaries into fixed sovereign boundaries (Leibold 2007, 18). For Callahan, China’s imperial
geo-body was not simply replaced by a new (sovereign) hegemonic conception of nation, but
was complemented by a second dominant territorial idea, and we can see the ongoing tension
between these two territorial ideas today. Callahan’s point of departure is fundamental to this
dissertation as it suggests that Thongchai’s original concept of the geo-body is as relevant to the
ongoing life of a nation’s territory as to its creation.

Two further modifications of Thongchai’s work come out of Callahan. First, Callahan
argues that a national geo-body is not exclusively a national boundary making project. A
geo-body also depends on regional boundaries that may or may not become national;
sub-national questions may be embedded in a national geo-body. Second, the geo-body is not simply a historical concept, but is “a site of struggle in a broader biopolitics of geobodies” (Callahan 2009, 147). Callahan points out that we need to better understand the ways geographic knowledge is generated, not only in terms of how representations (such as maps) are created, but how the production and regulation of the geo-body is a technology of bio-power (ibid., 145).

These ideas were part of a recent discussion, where John Agnew presented an overview of four Chinese geopolitical narratives that underlie most constructions of “China” in geopolitical discourse and drew on Callahan’s geo-body of national humiliation as one basis for such narratives (Agnew 2012, 311, 307). Curiously, only one commentator in this discussion actually cites Thongchai, offering the only clarification on the analytical meaning of the geo-body – that the geo-body was “derived from a more generalized Foucauldian notion of biopolitics” (Oakes 2012, 316). While Thongchai didn’t cite Foucault or mention biopolitics explicitly, this observation reflects Callahan’s extension of the geo-body idea.

Of the previous China-related literature that has employed the geo-body concept, Callahan is the only one to begin with Thongchai’s original formulation as a starting point for developing a more robust idea relevant to the ongoing production of the geo-body, both in its dominant national forms, and in its variations. Callahan wrote, “since the state can never exhaust cultural production, resistance to these centralizing efforts takes the form of alternative cultural productions, including alternative maps that inscribe various alternative geobodies” (2009, 145). This points the way forward for applying the geo-body analytic to contemporary China, for making the biopolitical underpinnings of the geo-body explicit, and more importantly for adapting Thongchai’s idea to the ongoing politics of a lived national geo-body, one as much a practice as a proposition.
The existing body of literature on China’s national geo-body poses a range of questions: What is the role of non-state actors in a national geo-body? How does the discursive construction of a nation relate to its territorial construction? How do sub-national questions – matters of region and place – relate to the national geo-body? What is the nature of China’s national geo-body today? And how should we understand the geo-body as an ongoing politics of territory? Taking the lead from these questions, this dissertation further extends the concept of the geo-body by addressing knowledge-making practices significant on a national scale that both support and challenge the dominant national idea. This approach allows us to see in the case of domestic tourism “the dispersal of power into the population...[how] the center invested people with the capacity to produce and consume things, insisting on freedom in some compartments of life, and obedience in others” (Miller 2010, 25). Changes in domestic tourism in China over the past two decades reflects this turn.

This dissertation focuses on the life and sustenance of China’s national geo-body, on the ways it has become a routine part of social life, and on the unprecedented ways that Chinese citizens have become an active part of a territorial project. The maintenance of the geo-body covers a full range of actions, from confirming existing knowledge through performative practice, to modifying or creating geographic knowledge that may solidify the state’s dominant vision of the geo-body or challenge that conception. Importantly, this new politics of geographic knowledge production works not only through new practices of representing and inscribing knowledge, but through lived experience in place and the incorporation of place knowledge into the body itself. Independent travel in China has become a way of enlivening the territorialized knowledge of the nation and adapting it to new purposes, from national renewal, to modernization, to globalization, or however change is conceptualized in contemporary
China. To travel the geo-body is to concretize the geo-body, to add layers of collectively-shared knowledge that gives shape to a national idea.

The geo-body present

Each of the previously mentioned studies – including Thongchai – treats the geo-body primarily as the production of the state and national elite. But Thongchai himself hints at the importance of other social activities – of moments (1994, 18) – where new and old discourses collide. Callahan shows how the geo-body as a living, dynamic idea is still relevant to the production of a national frame of reference (Löfgren 1989). This echoes the renewed attention in political geography to everyday nationhood (Billig 1995; Edensor 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008) and to better understanding how the everyday practices of citizens can become engaged in producing the national geo-body. There is no knowledge without practice, and practice “is not some mysterious agency, some substratum of history, some hidden engine: it is what people do (the word says just what it means)” (Veyne 1997). My use of everyday practice refers to the practices of ordinary Chinese not acting on behalf of the state or related elite institutions. The primary contrast is between the practices of formal nationalism (bureaucratic organization, meritocratic ideology, cultural uniformity, and political consensus) and the practices of informal nationalism (collective events, routines) (Eriksen 1993).

Thongchai frames his work in terms of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities, presenting the geo-body as another way to get at the creation of nationhood: The nation is not a “given reality” (Thongchai 1994, 14) but an effect of various techniques of imagining made powerful through print capitalism. Thongchai was interested in what besides a language-based imagination (the vernacular language and print technology that Anderson focused on) is involved in conceptualizing nationhood. He found an answer in mapping and cartography as
primary technologies of producing the geo-body. However, while Thongchai critiques Anderson’s work for focusing too much on the conceivability of the nation we can nonetheless turn that critique back on itself and ask: In what ways other than representational knowledge practices might nationhood be produced?

The territoriality of a nation involves regular actions and practices in addition to the representational knowledge reflected in texts and images, for example, the various ways the nation is “flagged” through everyday objects (Billig 1995). But such practices require real bodies in real places. The actions of bodies make the representations possible. The body is important not simply as a container or medium for propositional knowledge, but as a repository for practical knowledge. It is impossible to know the national geo-body without the involvement of bodies in place: exploration generates forms of bodily knowledge gained through place-based experience. Such practices are implicit in Thongchai’s study, for example, in the land surveys of Siamese, British, and French experts. Thongchai simply emphasized the product of that work over the process, on the maps that became the defining representations of Thailand. He was interested in how the geo-body is produced through “politico-semiological operations” (Thongchai 1994, 18). I argue that we should also consider politico-somatic operations, and position the idea of exploring place as a way to understand this lived practice of knowing and sustaining the national geo-body.

Empirically, this dissertation addresses the ways China’s geo-body is sustained through independent tourism by focusing on an exemplary case of who is involved, in what places, and through what practices. The story of how China’s national geo-body is sustained is told in the
following chapters through the interrelationship of independent tourists, the making of places for independent tourism, and the practice of exploring place.

Chapter Two argues that domestic tourism in China has changed over the past twenty years, expanding from a state-managed tourism revival emphasizing package tourism to what has been called an “age of independent tourism.” This change reflects a new tourism ordering in post-reform China that has its roots in the early reform era focus on inbound package tourism and in the extension of this model to the domestic market. The changes the state made in domestic tourism policy set the stage not only for a boom in domestic package tourism, but also for a boom in independent tourism, which by the late 2000s was already challenging the state’s model for tourism. Behind these changes were new state attitudes toward leisure and tourism as well as new desires and practices of Chinese seeking travel experiences that the state model was never built to provide. The combination of a new age of leisure with unparalleled economic growth set the stage for a boom in independent domestic tourism, which at its simplest is self-organized tourism, rather than tourism that relies upon the knowledge and services of tourism experts. Independent tourism is a practice of a new, exemplary social group that corresponds generally to China’s urban middle class. It is a new spatial practice that has spilled over the boundaries of the state tourism geography and sought out places for tourism across China’s rural and remote areas. And it is a new, generative knowledge practice in the sense that new knowledge about China is employed in organizing and undertaking travel, and that this knowledge becomes a part of collective knowledge about where and how to travel the nation.

Chapter Three argues that independent tourism needs to be understood as part of a new national placemaking project that has transformed tourism places in contemporary China from serving primarily as standardized, centrally-administered package tourism sites to increasingly serving the heterogenous desires of an individualizing nation seeking out opportunities for
discovery and exploration. As land has been commodified, and as the central state has decentralized its oversight of land use and development, a new place-based urbanism has emerged as one most important resources for local government revenue. In the variety of placemaking projects that have resulted from these changes can be found a development strategy I call the production of *explorable place*, of building places a way that connects tourism and everyday life practices in a heterogenous space that and commodifies an experience of exploration and discovery. This contrasts sharply with the notion of a state approved network of tourism scenic spots designed exclusively for tourism experiences and the transmission of state cultural authority (Nyiri 2005). A conceptual distinction is suggested here, between specialized spaces built to represent and display culture for tourists – thus requiring expert interpretation – to a wider variety of places built to encourage self-organized experiences. This is a significant spatial change in China, as an older paradigm of building the state’s cultural authority into China’s leisure spaces has shifted to building places that encourage consumer behaviors desirable for China’s unique form of state capitalism. We can see in domestic tourism the ways that the social and economic changes of the post-reform era have played out spatially.

Chapter Four argues that place is important in China not simply as a destination for travel or a strategic production that serves to order a new service-based economy, but as a spatial practice of *exploring place*, of coming to know the interconnections between self, social relationships, specific places, and one’s wider world through a body that articulates this interconnection. Changes in tourism have not simply taken place in terms of state policy and state-approved development projects, but also in the desires and practices of Chinese people. Independent tourism should be seen not only as an activity put into order by the state, but also as an ordering activity in itself. This ordering affects tourism itself, the places being made for tourism, and also the ways that geographic knowledge is produced. In other words, the
changing knowledge of place in China is not exclusively ordered by material and ideological productions, but is also ordered by spatial bodies – by the real actions of real bodies in real places. This is as true of “state explorers” – the officials and scholars operating within a state knowledge project – as it is of “ordinary explorers,” who through the spatial practice of tourism have generated new knowledge about China as a nation of places, as well as knowledge of how to travel and live in that nation. As China has taken to travel over the past two decades, exploring place has become a nationally shared routine, generative of a geographic knowledge both distinct from cognized knowledge and also a fundamental part of it.

Chapter Five tells three exploration stories that illustrate how the discovery of Yading has become routine, drawn into the center of the nation through the lived experience of place. The establishment of the Yading Nature Reserve, and its subsequent rise to fame as a national symbol of natural beauty, was based on repeating practices of exploration and discovery that were powerful not simply because they generated influential visual representations of the place. The exploration of Yading and its ongoing discovery by tourists depended on embodied practices of seeing that generated bodily forms of knowledge that were and continue to be integral to placing Yading in the national geo-body. Each of these stories, which span 80 years, illustrate the interdependent relationship of discursive and non-discursive knowledge practices. The politics of geographic knowledge production plays out not only through the images and discourses attached to Yading, but through the bodily knowledge generated by those who travel there. As increasing numbers of domestic Chinese tourists visit Yading, the geographic knowledge of the reserve and of Greater Shangrila is sedimented not only in representational forms, but in a shared bodily memory of being there.

Finally, Chapter Six focuses on the dissertation argument overall, on the new politics that is generated as Chinese travel outside the established tourism geography and explore cities, the
countryside, and remote areas in new ways. As exploring place has become emblematic of
Chinese tourism, the knowledge of China as a geo-body has come to be produced not simply by
state elites and experts but by exploring citizens. Exploring place serves to maintain the status
quo, being a practice closely aligned with the political economy of tourism and urban
development advanced by the state. And yet exploring place has also changed China’s geo-body,
bringing new knowledge of new places to regional and national attention. Through these new
tourism practices, certain parts of China, such as Yading, have been incorporated as key features
of the national geo-body, while other places and other politics have been effaced. The new
politics identified here is not simply a politics of complicity of China’s urban middle class in the
state nation-making project, nor one about the resistance to such a project by a disillusioned
citizenry. The new politics is about an unprecedented shift in national knowledge production in
China and the ways that complicity and resistance are rearticulated. Chapter Six ends with a
concluding discussion of the dissertation overall, drawing out key themes and findings.

*The research project*

Exploring place not only evokes a conceptual frame for understanding the knowledge
practices that sustain China’s geo-body, but also suggests a methodological approach. Each
academic discipline that informs this dissertation has called for improved grounded fieldwork
(see Driver 2001; Woon 2013; Megoran 2006). And because the geo-body analytic has not been
studied through primary fieldwork, my broad empirical goal in this research is to explore the
practices that sustain geo-body. As the question of the geo-body broadens to include
incorporating practices as well as inscribing practices, the methodological focus also shifts from
targeting visualization and cognition to targeting bodily practices (see Ingold and Vergunst
2008). This dissertation examines how new knowledge of a nation – inscribed and incorporated
– is woven from new knowledge of places and regions, and asks who is involved, in what places, and through what practices?

My starting point for the field research, which took place between early 2009 and the fall of 2011, was to approach independent tourists as they traveled. I set out to meet tourists on their travels, to travel with them, and understand qualitatively how independent tourism was different from package tourism. I was a participant-observer in the Yading Nature Reserve over multiple trips, and I spent over two months in the reserve altogether. I fell into rhythms of walking, talking, photographing, and resting during a typical visit to Yading with independent tourists already in the reserve. During this participant-observation I had conversations with dozens of tourists, spent anywhere from a few minutes to full days with over thirty tourists, and followed up with five participants for more detailed interviews about their current trip and their personal travel history. This methodological choice reflected my interest in connecting tourism in Yading with life in urban China.

I didn’t set out to analyze independent tourism demographically, though the tourists I spoke with in Yading were largely Han Chinese from urban areas, and most were college graduates in professional or government careers. They usually traveled in small groups often three or more, occasionally solo or in a larger group arriving by bus or private car. Men and women were similarly well-represented, though tourist roles were gendered, with women traveling alone generally outnumbering men, and men usually acting as trip leaders and drivers on automobile trips. The gendered practices of independent tourism is an important question and an opportunity for future research. These roles are apparent in the following chapters, and while gender is not an explicit analytical tool in this dissertation, the shift in attention from cognitive, visual practices to non-cognitive bodily practices is implicitly informed by feminist theory, which has been an important part of bringing the gendered body back into social theory.
Tourists in Yading had the leisure time and the income to make the long trip across Sichuan, and while most weren’t rich or powerful, they fit the broad definition of those who have benefitted most from China’s economic reforms and growth over the past twenty years, Chinese who make up what Deng Xiaoping envisioned as a reasonably well-off society (xiaokang shehui, 小康社会). I’ll have more to say about independent tourists as a population in Chapter Two.

In addition to the tourist participants, I completed semi-structured interviews with other sources for details on placemaking projects and background information on tourism development. These interviews included government officials, scholars, media workers, and small business owners, primarily in Sichuan Province and in Beijing, and were especially important in developing and understanding of the changing political economy of tourism in China.

One final aspect of this research concerns the role of the local residents and tourism service workers in Yading, who are mostly Kham Tibetans born and raised in the area. The political situation in Tibet has been tense since the March 2008 riots in Lhasa, and this presented challenges to setting up my research in Sichuan. I had hoped to include more of this side of the story in the dissertation, though there were limitations on what I as a foreign researcher was able to do. From the outset I was focused on tourists and the ways their knowledge practices work “upwards” toward the nation, but I want to recognize the Tibetan residents of Yading and neighboring villages for their important role in this story, whether as government officials, seasonal tourism workers, family members, or agricultural workers. They are also a part of the new politics of geographic knowledge in China, and their more vulnerable position is a story that deserves to be told in greater detail.

Places – real and imagined – are central in this dissertation, and I sought to focus on two particular places in Sichuan Province (Figure 2), a large, geographically diverse province with a
booming tourism economy (12 percent of provincial GDP). I sought out a research site where I could observe independent tourism in practice, hopefully in relative isolation from the package tourism infrastructure that tends to define China’s most popular scenic spots. I had visited the Yading Nature Reserve in 1999, ten years before the field research for this dissertation began and the year the first tourism office opened in the Daocheng county seat. Through my own experience as a tourist in Yading, I had a reference point for the changes independent tourism brought since tourism became a local economic focus. Once a forgotten corner of Sichuan, Yading has been transformed after being “discovered” just as China’s reforms were implemented in 1979, and made into a national-level nature reserve at the turn of the twenty-first century with international recognition and rising importance as a national symbol.

I also sought out a research site where independent tourism was less distinct, where it blurred together both with the formal tourism industry and with everyday life practices, and where placemaking projects and practices of exploring place converged. I sought a place that was linked to Yading, since changes there seemed so deeply linked to other places, through a network of tourism routes and stopovers that lace southwestern China, and to the urban centers where most tourists reside. No other major city in China has been as important to Yading’s past and future as Chengdu, Sichuan’s provincial capital, and for this reason the city is the secondary research site for this dissertation. Like Yading, Chengdu has changed dramatically since 1999, though in much more palpable ways. It is by some accounts China’s fourth city (after Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou) and while it could be argued that Chongqing holds this distinction, Chengdu’s position is unique as an economic hub for western China, the site of China’s southwestern military command, a strategic position on the borderlands of Tibet, and a city rich in local history and tourism resources. The changes that have taken place in Yading are
connected with changes happening throughout China, and I approached Chengdu as a concrete location to explore these changes.

Figure 2: Research sites: Chengdu, Daocheng, and Yading.

In focusing on the knowledge practices that sustain the geo-body, this dissertation is related to what Latour imagined as an ethnography of inscription, a focus on the “precise practice and craftsmanship of knowing” – on the practical tasks of writing and representation – rather than on the products of inscription themselves (1986, 3). For Latour, the focus on the practices rather than the products of inscription addresses how “insignificant people working only with papers and signs” become powerful (ibid., 29). My approach departs from Latour’s focus on inscription by focusing on what Connerton (1989) has called incorporating practices,
practices that through routines, repetition and habit draw knowledge into the body itself. My approach can be thought of as an ethnography of incorporation, not a replacement for Latour’s approach but rather a complement to its core purpose. If the creation of the geo-body involved mapping and calculative practices, the sustaining of the geo-body must work with and within these inscriptions. However, incorporating practices and practical knowledge are a necessary part of how a geo-body is sustained in a living contemporary context. As a methodological approach to studying the life of a national geo-body, exploring place highlights the interdependence of practices of inscription and incorporation.

This dissertation contributes to three intersecting areas of scholarship. First, and most broadly, this dissertation contributes to previous research on the geo-body by providing an ethnographically grounded study of the geo-body as an ongoing, living practice of place. This extends discussions across cultural and political geography of the relationship of place and territory that began with Sack (1986) and continues with Elden (2010a). In looking at how the geo-body is produced through the practices of a population, this study contributes to ongoing discussions of biopolitics and territory (see Foucault 2009): “The territorial and the biopolitical exist, and therefore must be analyzed together” (Elden 2009, 58). With the shift to a market economy, a growing service sector, and increased reliance on consumption, the role of the citizen in China is increasingly that of a consumer. And in contrast to the command economy and the state’s spatial intrusion into social life (see Bray 2005), the process of territorialization involves the practices of consumer-citizens (see Tomba 2004).

Second, in focusing on the knowledge practices of China’s middle class, this study contributes to the literature on the politics of knowledge (Crampton and Elden 2007; Mignolo
and Tlostanova 2006) by elaborating on a specific set of knowledge practices the middle class brings to bear in knowing place and territory. This dissertation addresses the emergent political role of China’s urban middle class (see Chen and Yi 2004; Li 2004) as knowledge-making national subjects (Billig 1995; Skey 2009; Palmer 1998; Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Dittmer and Gray 2010). It explores how China’s middle class fits socially and spatially in the nation and how their desires and skills have generated knowledge relevant to the ongoing life of the national geo-body. It also tells us something about the relationship between state power and citizenship, that consumer-citizens play an active role in the territorial politics of nation-making. In terms of specific knowledge practices, this study elaborates on discussions of embodiment in non-representational theory (Thrift 2000; Barnett 2008; Lorimer 2008; Cresswell 2012), taking it not simply as a means for the (re)production representational knowledge, but as a viable and necessary knowledge practice in itself (Connerton 1989; Taylor 2003; Casey 2001; Edensor 2010).

Third, this study contributes to critical tourism studies (see Ateljevic, Pritchard and Morgan 2007; Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard 2011; Bianchi 2009), to the discussion of tourism as political practice (Minca 2011) and as a particular form of social ordering in contemporary China (Franklin 2004; Franklin 2008). This dissertation highlights the ways tourism that has changed place in China through a period of economic growth, expanding leisure practices, and shifting practices of governance. It contributes to broader discussions of tourism and place (Sheller and Urry 2004; Britton 1991; Veijola 2006), and to previous research on the relationship between tourism and place in China (Oakes 2012; Oakes 2011) by focusing on independent tourism, an understudied but increasingly common aspect of tourism in China. The focus on bodily knowledge practices is relevant to discussions of the body in tourism (Veijola and Jokinen 1994; Crouch 2000), and its role in seeing and photography (Mitchell 2002; Schwartz 1996; Balm and Holcomb 2003; Larsen 2006; Jokinen and Veijola 2003) and walking (Ingold 2010;
Edensor 2011). In focusing on how independent tourists are engaged in the ordering of tourism, this study also challenges state-centered conceptions of tourism in China. More broadly, this concerns the ways that Chinese society and culture are spatialized (see Bray 2005). Finally, this dissertation is relevant to discussions in tourism history that have addressed the convergence of tourism, citizenship, and nation-making, such as in the case of tourism in the opening of the American West (Shaffer 2001), in the early Soviet Union (Gorsuch and Koenker 2006), or in post-war Japan (Ivy 1995).
The age of independent tourism

Day one. In September 2010, I arrived at the new terminal of Chengdu’s Shuangliu International Airport to check in for my flight to Kangding, the prefecture seat of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The curved, metal-and-glass cavern was similar to most of the new transportation terminals being constructed across China. At the counter, I was told that provincial and regional flights – to places such as Xichang, Lijiang, and Lhasa – departed from the Old Terminal, a squat, square building next door covered in yellow tile and still topped with the neon red characters of the city’s name: 成都.

I walked through a gap in the new terminal wall and down a connecting corridor to gate C16, which happened to be crowded with middle aged tourists. They were queued for the flight to the Jiuzhai-Huanglong Airport, which services the Jiuzhaigou National Park and nearby scenic areas. While I waited I browsed a store that sold travel gear useful in the mountains: long underwear, walking shoes, fleece layers, and rain shells. Hanging at the door was a light-blue hooded shell featuring “Professional Outei-Tex Water Proof & Breathable Fabric,” its diamond-shaped black and gold tag an homage to Gore-Tex. The Old Terminal, with its pastel plastic seats, drop ceiling, and fluorescent light fixtures was a throwback to an earlier age of jet travel in China. But gate C16 was also a portal to the cutting edge of travel in China, to
destinations on China’s rugged western borderlands, and to ethnic minority areas that have over the past two decades been transformed into some of China’s top tourism destinations. And for those unprepared, the necessary gear could be bought while waiting to board.

When the Communist Party came to national power in 1949, no motor road existed between Chengdu and Kangding, though the route was vitally important for the tea trade, which involved twenty-day overland trips by porters. In 1951, when the first road was built over the Erlang mountains, trucks could make the trip in two days, connecting southwestern China and eastern Tibet even more closely and killing the traditional tea trade in the process (Booz 2011, 321). For decades, even into the 1990s, the trip to Kangding remained a day-long journey, though the 2001 opening of the Erlangshan Tunnel reduced that time to six hours, depending on the severity of traffic or landslides.4 In 2009, sixty years after the founding of the PRC, the Kangding Airport – now the third highest in the world – received its first passenger flight.

My morning flight to Kangding was an easy 35 minutes and saved me a half-day’s travel along National Road 318, a route that begins in Shanghai and ends at Nepal and includes part of the Sichuan-Tibet highway. My plane taxied and took off without stopping, a nonchalant departure out of the foggy Sichuan Basin. The plane touched down in a mist and parked a hundred yards from Kangding’s terminal building. We had to get out and walk to the nearly empty terminal, designed to look vaguely like a traditional Tibetan building. Unlike the flight to Jiuzhaigou that had queued before mine, there were no tour groups on my flight to Kangding that morning. Once the bags were collected, passengers dissolved at the parking lot, most heading to waiting cars and minivans. I found the airport bus into town and studied the billboard advertisement for China Telecom’s 3G wireless network, which I would see all across

---

4The Erlangshan tunnel was completed in 2001. The first tests for traffic through the mountain began in 1999, which is sometimes given as the opening date.
sparsely settled Ganzi Prefecture. Just before departing, three travelers got on – Zhou Liang, Cui Hong, and Chen Xiaofeng, all friends from university.

The airport bus descended a mile in elevation in less than an hour, swinging through dozens of turns, passing transport trucks and an army convoy. From across the aisle I asked Zhou and his friends about their travel plans. They were planning to take the next morning’s bus to Daocheng, the same one I planned to take. They were heading for Yading, and were taking advantage of the extra time the flight allowed them. Despite the rain, they would visit Mugecuo, a mountain lake and one of Kangding’s top tourism sites. The airport bus delivered us to an intersection in Kangding dominated by a road sign displaying distances to a score of tourist sites nearby (Mugecuo: 34km). Zhou and his friends had arrived without reservations for lodging – an unwise choice in the fall high season – and needed to find a hostel before their day of sightseeing. But before that we headed for the long distance bus station to buy the next day’s tickets to Daocheng. We passed a small park that memorializes the dead tea trade, where a life-size cast-bronze tea caravan, frozen in time, approaches the gates of Dajianlu, as Kangding had once been known.

In 2008 one of China’s most important government think tanks, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), published a report on China’s travel agencies that characterized this as “an age of independent tourism” (Xiao 2011). While China’s tourism industry was founded on a group tourism model (jituan lüyou, 集团旅游), the report argued that since the 1990s China’s travel agencies have seen a shift in demand away from group tours and toward what the industry calls FIT, or “free independent travelers” (sanke, 散客). The report argued that since 1990, with the rise of independent forms of tourism, trends in tourist demand have reversed,
with package tours dropping from 70 percent of travel agency business to only 30 percent. By 2008, the report argued, 70 percent of travel agency clients were now FIT, tourists who booked the major components of tourism – transportation and lodging – according to their own needs instead of purchasing an inclusive package tour. While the report highlighted the changes happening within the tourism industry, it acknowledged the fact that these changes were coming from outside the industry, as Chinese increasingly sought new modes of “free” tourism practices (ziyou lüyou fangshi, 自由旅游方式). The particular challenge facing travel agencies was the growing number of “completely self-reliant” tourists (wanquan yikao ziji de lüyou, 完全依靠自己的旅游) (Xiao 2011, 236). As opposed to FIT tourists, these independent tourists (zizhu lüyou zhe, 自助旅游者) have gained the desire and skills for travel that does not rely upon the expertise of tourism professionals.

The “age of independent tourism” is not simply a marketing challenge for the tourism industry. It reflects a fundamental change in Chinese domestic tourism. Following national reforms that began in 1979, domestic tourism became organized and regulated by the state through the 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, domestic tourism has expanded rapidly beyond the professionalized, “expert” authority of the state-regulated industry to more diversified forms of self-organized travel. This chapter argues that this change reflects a new ordering of tourism in post-reform China, where the ordering effects of nationally shared practices of independent domestic tourism have taken on a greater role than ever before.

My approach to independent tourism in China differs from dominant approaches in tourism studies (see MacCannell 1999; Urry 2002) in that I do not take tourism as a preexisting structure or domain for human activity, but rather as the result of processes of ordering (Law 1994, 12). I am more interested in the powers, cultures, and knowledge that go into solidifying tourism as a kind of social and political order, and in the effects that this ordering has (see
Franklin 2004, 281). This approach follows Adrian Franklin’s (2004) conceptualization of tourism as an ordering, an approach based on the broader sociological literature on ordering. Ordering is an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a static state of order (Law 1994, 2), though there are elements of ordering that stabilize into routines and regularities (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 29). Ordering is also always a partial project – attempts at ordering are never fully successful, and always to a certain extent fail (ibid., 32; see Malpas and Wickham 1995).

Ordering can be thought of as an elaboration on a Foucauldian approach to governing (Kendall and Wickham 2001, 27–28), to “techniques and procedures for directing human behavior” (1997, 81). It broadens that approach to include a wider range of practices concerned with the “control and management of things” (Malpas and Wickham 1995, 47), with “a series of intentional but non-subjective reflexive strategies” (Law 1994, 96). In other words, ordering can be thought of as conceptually similar to governance, and I use these terms somewhat interchangeably, since each is tuned to the other’s weakness: Ordering helps mitigate the conceptual slippage of governance into an exercise of hierarchical power, and governance helps mitigate the slippage of ordering into a completely flattened relational ontology. My interest in both concepts is that they can refer to practices of the self and of social groups just as they can to institutional practices, including those of the state. In fact my approach to the state is similar to that of the self in that the practices and strategies that put the state into to a recognizable order are in fact constitutive of the state.

Ordering is an approach closely related to actor-network theory (ANT), but without taking the strong flattening approach that ANT is sometimes critiqued for (see Castree 2002, 134). Franklin’s essay on ordering (2004) argues for a new ontology of tourism, which reflects the attempt to employ ordering not as a theoretical replacement for other theories, but as a way to shift the ontological basis for social theory. By highlighting the processes and practices that
go into making and sustaining a given order, a sociology of ordering challenges the
dominance of a Euclidean spatial ontology that characterizes space as an absolute and empty container.
Ordering is a particularly compelling approach for geographers, since confronting the ontology
of absolute space has been one of the fundamental contributions of human geography to social
theory (see Harvey 1969, 191). Ordering then, offers an approach to some of the most salient
questions in geography as a discipline. Ordering is also helpful in thinking through Lefebvre’s
critique of the production of space, and this conception of ordering runs through the discussion
of Lefebvre’s work to come.

Approaching tourism as an ordering is an approach to understanding “how tourism
works” (Duim 2007, 971) through multiple operating modes of ordering, each with different
ordering effects or arrangements. Addressing the tendency in tourism studies to take tourist
sites (and phenomenological experience at those sites) as tourism itself, as Franklin wrote,

> tourism is not just what tourists do at tourist sites, it is also how they came to be created as tourists... We still need to ask where the desire originates from; how the entire materially heterogeneous network supporting their ability to be tourists came to be the way it is and how tourism orders other objects and people in the world as well as the ordering effects that they in turn create (2004, 278).

Franklin expands the question of tourism beyond the actions of tourists and the
specialized sites of tourism, and makes a clear, important point: Tourism is “something that had
to be made to happen” (ibid., 279). Tourism is not a natural order, nor a cultural trait, but is itself
a product of ordering effects and arrangements (Orren and Skowronek 1996). This approach
necessitates situating independent domestic tourism in China in a social context, and given the
central place of tourism in post-reform China, it necessitates situating tourism in a national
context. Franklin argues that tourism is rooted in the formation of nation, and that to approach tourism as an ordering requires an understanding how the nation orders tourism, and what tourism’s role in ordering the nation becomes. This dissertation is positioned to address these issues in the context of the past 20 years of change in domestic tourism in China. My goal is to work through an understanding of tourism as an ordering in three particular ways, first as an ordering of place, second as an ordering of people, and finally as an ordering of knowledge, specifically an ordering of geographic knowledge relevant to the life of the national geo-body. This sequence maps the path ahead, with the current chapter serving to set the historical and conceptual background.

Day two. Another predawn departure. I ran into Zhou and his friends in the bus station parking lot as we threw our luggage into the bus’s rear compartment. We boarded and waited expectantly for the beginning of our twelve-hour journey across Kham to Daocheng County, which sits along Sichuan’s southwestern border with Yunnan and is the location of the Yading Nature Reserve. It was no tourist coach – there were business people and young couples, monks and farmers – though it served that purpose for us.

We departed Kangding in the dark and backtracked along the previous day’s route, passing signs for the airport. A little more awake, and in a little better weather than the previous morning, I fell into a rhythm watching the undulating high-tension power lines and cell towers along the foothills. We followed a newly resurfaced section of Route 318 that tracked Sichuan’s old tea-horse road from Kangding to Xinduqiao, where the road forked. Two brown cultural interest road signs pointed the way, one to the north (The Derge Buddhist Press: 507km), the other west (Daocheng Yading: 428km). We turned west toward Yajiang, and drove
along dew-soaked fields, past Tibetan children on their walk to school, and Zangjiale (藏家了) – “Happy Tibetan Home” guesthouses for tourists. By lunch we arrived at a rudimentary truck stop, and passengers walked predictably from bus to bathroom to cafeteria line. Unlike the roads around Kangding, Route 318 becomes a rutted, dusty track between Yajiang and Litang; the major road improvement project had not yet reached that far. As we crossed the Jianziwan pass into the highlands of Litang, Zhou opened a large laptop computer and plugged in earphones and a 3G mobile Internet adapter to chat in real time with friends. Cui leafed through a stack of paper they’d printed from the Internet, a set of traveler-researched travel tips known as gonglüe (攻略), literally a “plan of attack,” or simply “travel strategies.” Eventually she pulled a hood over her head to sleep. Once past Yajing, the bus ride played like a looping scene, the shell of the bus rattling as the driver navigated the ruts, the blue pleated curtains swaying, bumps throwing the back row passengers to the ceiling and waking the rest for a glimpse of the highlands. The loop repeated for hours.

After topping out on high grasslands and passing scenic overlooks crowded with SUVs and tourists making the overland drive, settlements appeared as we descended onto the Litang plain, first nomad tents, then a compact set of residences, and before long the blocky concrete structures of the Litang county seat. At Litang, we took a hard turn south through villages and then along a winding ascent to the moonlike, glacial terrain of Haizishan. Nearing the final pass before Daocheng, Zhou pointed to the Tibetan lettering on a hillside – Om Mani Padme Hum, the mantra of Avalokitesvara known and displayed across Tibet. He asked the driver what it meant. With a chuckle, the driver said “It says tashi delek. It’s a welcome to you all.”

Pulling into the Daocheng bus station is like driving through the gap between two teeth, a restaurant to one side, a shop to the other and a hole in the street facade. Our bus drove through it and stopped in the center of the back lot. Touts from Daocheng’s guesthouses
approached the door with laminated photographs of their lodgings, knowing instinctively who to pester. Zhou, Cui, and Chen let out a gasp of surprise as the driver opened the luggage compartment and they found their bags covered in twelve hours of road dust. Cui took another look at their travel strategies: They had already decided where they wanted to stay, but needed to get oriented and have a look at the place before being sure. I told them to give me a call if it didn’t work out and they wanted to look at the guesthouse where I was staying. We were out-of-towners traveling the same road (tonglu, 同路), reason enough to set aside any urban aloofness and learn a little from one another.

_The tourism revival_

Thirteen years before Deng Xiaoping’s famed 1992 Southern Tour (nanxun, 南巡), which would kick off China’s Special Economic Zones and a decades-long economic boom, Deng made a less well known southern tour to Huangshan, China’s famed Yellow Mountain. In July 1979, not three years after Mao’s death, Deng climbed Huangshan, walking stick in hand, pants rolled above his knees, family members in tow, using the occasion to give the last of five strategic speeches on tourism. The talks would set the course for a new national industry that would in time become a core part of China’s economy (Xiao 2006; Airey and Chong 2011, 154–176). Deng would come to be called the founder and creator of China’s tourism industry, a role punctuated by his climb of Huangshan, and the tourism development strategies underscored by that visit (Xiao 2006; Tong and Li 2008).

Deng’s tourism talks, which began in October 1978, marked the beginning of a revival in China’s tourism industry (Xiao 2006). After thriving briefly in the 1920s and 1930s, leisure travel became ideologically suspect during the Mao era, though it did survive in the guise of political education, for example in during what was known as the Great Link Up (Da chuan lian, 大串联)
in 1966 and 1967. With the overall reform and opening project underway, Deng saw tourism as an economic opportunity rather than as an ideological threat. While only one of Deng’s tourism speeches addressed the State Council (most were addressed to tourism-related bureaus and leadership) the timing of these speeches at the outset of economic reforms indicated the importance tourism would have in the following decades. The talks outlined specific objectives of a new comprehensive industry (ibid.): Tourism would be an important source of foreign investment. It would help establish diplomatic and international business connections. It would create new employment opportunities. It would help both urban and rural development by generating profits that could be reinvested in local infrastructure and help balance income inequality. And it would help speed capital accumulation through the development of the service industry.

Besides reviving tourism as an economic development strategy, Deng’s tourism talks were important in articulating a vision of what specific form this new industry would take (ibid.): The tourism industry depended on coordination with international markets and airlines. It required hotel construction in key cities and tourist sites. It required the establishment of tourist sites and set itineraries. It required the promotion of particular tourism destinations. It demanded tourism entrepreneurship and specialized tourism businesses. It required a broader awareness of the natural environment, such as Huangshan, as a tourism resource. It required the development of better tourist services, from souvenirs to food to tourism-related entertainments. Tourism, above all, needed to be ordered and organized, and the actions of Deng and the State Council (which would issue a national tourism policy in 1981) indicated the state would take the lead and that political and economic benefits were the priority (He 1982).

The tourism revival would establish a formalized system built to handle large numbers of
tourists through standardized itineraries, the expertise of travel agencies and guides, and an expanded tourism infrastructure, which the state was heavily invested in. In other words the revival of tourism in China was built not around emerging market demand, but around a standardizable and measurable tourism product: the package tour. However, in Deng’s own visit to Huangshan we can recognize an element of tourism in China that has been present all along, something more than an activity delimited by tour guides and preset itineraries: The iconic photo of Deng’s Huangshan visit is of him standing proudly on a mountain trail, nature at his back, no person in sight, a proud gaze cast across one of China’s most iconic landscapes (Figure 3).

![Deng Xiaoping on Huangshan, July 1979.](image)

Deng climbed Huangshan on the same paths as the “masses” with an air of adventure and adversity. A doctor accompanying him on the climb reportedly advised seventy-five-year-old
Deng to stop and rest. Deng responded, “We shouldn’t stay too long on Huangshan. If we sit, we won’t be able to get up. This is the experience we’ve gained from the Red Army’s Long March over snow mountains and across grasslands” (Tong and Li 2008, 7). Even as Deng established a vision for a national tourism development project, he modeled a comportment to China’s national landscape that was different from the typical package tourist, one that referenced the myth-like travails of the Red Army’s march through the minority areas of the eastern Himalayas, the connection to ordinary people, and the need to endure a bit of bodily difficulty.

By the late 1980s, less than a decade after Deng’s southern tour to Huangshan, increasing numbers of domestic tourists were turning to travel agencies and package tours because of the conveniences of pre-organized transportation, subsidized accommodation and ticket prices, and ambitious itineraries (Zhang 1989, 54). While outside the scope of Deng’s tourism talks and the central role of inbound foreign tourism that drove the revival, the central government indicated it was paying attention to domestic tourism as early as 1984, even though it adopted a “Three No” policy – No Support, No Objection, No Promotion (Airey and Chong 2011, 167) – which meant that while domestic tourism was not forbidden, the state sought to avoid encouraging it. The Tiananmen protests in 1989 would dramatically affect inbound foreign tourism,5 but had a greater effect on internal party politics, to which Deng would respond by making an inspection tour of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai in early 1992 and announcing new policies to speed economic development.

In the years after Deng’s justly more famous Southern Tour, as China’s economic growth

---

improved, China’s tourism revival began to transform domestic tourism. That year marked an important change in macroeconomic policy, with the State Council issuing a new national policy\(^6\) to speed the development of the service sector economy, which specifically mentioned tourism as part of improving living standards (xiaokang shuiping, 小康水平). The following year, in 1993, the China National Tourism Administration’s (CNTA) “Ideas on Developing a Domestic Tourism Industry” was approved by the State Council, a plan that called for integrating domestic tourism into China’s national development plan, fostering orderly competition in the domestic tourism market, developing mass tourism products (dazhong lüyou chanpin, 大众旅游产品), improving the quality and safety of tourist interests, and strengthening government management oversight of the domestic tourism industry (guonei lüyouye, 国内旅游业). The CNTA was and is a relatively weak political institution in China, and most of its major policy initiatives reflect the decisions of the State Council or other more powerful ministries (Airey and Chong 2011). But while the CNTA decision specifically referenced the State Council’s previous decision to speed the service sector economy, it was nevertheless the first set of recommendations for drawing domestic tourism into China’s national development project. This initial step at formalizing a domestic tourism industry highlighted the two main elements of the tourism revival: the state’s role as tourism manager and the focus on “mass” tourism as the defining mode of domestic tourism.

By the late 1990s, tourism had been incorporated into the development plans of 24 out of 31 provincial-level governments (Wu, Zhu and Xu 2000), and was transformed from being an economic strategy with an opaque political role to a multifunctional strategic industry with explicit economic, political, and social goals (Airey and Chong 2011, 25). China’s tourism

---

\(^6\)The decision’s title is “Guanyu jiaokuai fazhan di san chanye de jueding [On the Decision to Speed Development of the Service Sector Economy].”
development took the form of a state-regulated national network of travel agencies, hotels and scenic spots that, while fragmented across multiple government offices at multiple scales, built the sites, services, and subjectivities of modern tourism in China. The tourism revival became a national development project, a universalized vision of social life within the framework of the nation-state with the goal of economic growth (McMichael 2004, 25) that requires a specific geographical setting in which development unfolds (Crush 1995). And as the tourism project extended into rural and remote areas across China, such as in Daocheng County, it also took on the role of a civilizing project (see Harrell 1995), a way of engaging China’s peripheral areas in national development goals. With the attention and resources the state has brought to bear on developing domestic “mass” tourism, how is it that twenty years later this project is being challenged by independent tourism? This cannot be explained simply through the actions of the Chinese state.

China’s high-level policy changes indicate the central state’s desire to promote domestic tourism, and they were critical in establishing a tourism industry at all levels of government. However, one thing these changes did not do is create domestic tourism out of thin air, or direct the desire of every Chinese citizen toward package tourism products. By the time the CNTA released its 1993 notice, domestic tourism was already growing – in fact, the document actually begins by referencing it: Between 1985 and 1992, the annual growth of domestic person-trips approached 5 percent and domestic tourism profits were growing nearly 20 percent. The central state decisions regarding domestic tourism in the early 1990s should be seen not only as a new initiative of the central state to consolidate the governance of domestic tourism, but also as an official acknowledgement of the changes that had already taken place before those governing strategies were announced.

The practice of domestic tourism in the 1980s is important: At a time when the tourism
industry was ramping up to handle growing inbound foreign tourism, one account estimated that 90 percent of domestic tourists were already traveling without the help of travel agencies and that of those who did join package tours only a fraction paid themselves (Zhang 1989, 54). While the stereotypes and dominant coverage of Chinese tourism have generally been that of “mass” tourism, the reality is that package touring is not a cultural trait in China, but rather is a historical event timed to the tourism revival and to the strategic industry developed through the 1980s and 1990s. We should approach the current age of independent tourism in the same way, as just as “Chinese” as the package tourism industry established during the revival. And regardless of whether we are interested in package or independent tourism, it would be a mistake to overplay the state’s role in the rise of domestic tourism, a change already underway when the state moved to manage and stimulate domestic tourism in the 1990s. The national development project not only targeted ethnic minorities on the periphery (Harrell 1995) and rural migrants bridging rural and urban (Pun 2004; Yan 2006), but also the desired core of Chinese citizenry, the “high quality,” reasonably well-off middle class (Tomba 2009).

The idea that the diverse practices of tourism could be formed into an integrated industry indicates more about the Chinese state vision for tourism than the reality, a situation common to the tourism industry in other national contexts. The tourism industry was (and remains) fragmented across multiple national government bureaus, airlines, hotel groups, state and private travel agencies, travel wholesalers, destination managers, real estate developers, local government offices, entrepreneurs, and local businesses, a problem replicated through each level of government, from central to local (Airey and Chong 2011, 136–137). The tourism industry has been just as uneven geographically, both because of the distribution of “tourism resources” (cultural or natural heritage sites) and because of preferential government policy (for example, tourism in western China received a boost once the Open Up The West program was
implemented). However fragmented and uneven as this network may be, China’s tourism scholars refer to it as a “mass” tourism industry (dazhong lüyouye, 大众旅游业) (Dai and Xia 2009), reflecting the state’s overall focus on providing tourism services that can generate economic growth important at a national scale. The objective of developing tourism as an “industry” (hangye, 行业; shiye, 事业) is as evident in Deng’s language as it is today. However, the form this new industry would take was a tourism system (Mill and Morrison 2013) that reflected the hierarchies, management, and goals of the government more than what China’s domestic tourists desired and put into practice.

*Mindless masses?*

The day I queued for my flight to Kangding – Zhou, Cui, and Chen were somewhere in that crowd – was not the first time I waited at gate C16 for a flight from Chengdu into the mountains. The previous April, I had bought a one-way flight to Jiuzhaigou, China’s premier national park in the mountains north of Chengdu, sister park to Yellowstone, and the dominant example of nature-based tourism development in China. Unlike my departure to Kangding, that flight was filled with package tourists, with large groups from Tianjin, Zhejiang Province, and Japan. Traveling solo, I was out of place, jostling among tour groups even before boarding.

At takeoff, the plane rose out of the Chengdu fog into a clear pocket of sky. A thick ceiling of clouds passed above, and mist filled the Sichuan Basin like lake water below, turning hilltops into islands and mountain valleys into fjords. At the basin’s edge, the sky opened to blue, and the pale morning light touched snow capped mountains that rippled to the horizon – Gonggashan, Siguniangshan. As a man from Zhejiang snored next to me, I mindlessly opened my in-flight snack, a package of cookies called “Leisure Biscuits.” Southwest China Airlines seemed to know exactly why people took this flight. The hillsides below were not terraced into
fields, and bore no trace of human or animal pathways; they were sharp and steep. While still
high above them the plane’s flaps lowered and its landing gear extended. This felt like a mistake
until the rock walls began to rise and close in, and then, suddenly, a runway appeared under the
wing. We didn’t land; the earth leapt up to meet us.

Looking backward down the runway at the Jiuzhaigou-Huanglong Airport, you can see
the tops of mountains separated by an empty expanse. I faced a similar situation looking at the
billboards across the airport parking lot, where I could find no transportation onwards. The tour
groups on my flight shuffled from airplane to baggage claim to bus, whisked away early enough
that they likely made it to the park that same day. I, on the other hand, found myself stuck.
Airport shuttles into Jiuzhaigou town were not yet running on the normal tourism season
schedule, and there was a seven-person minimum for an unscheduled run. Since I’d arranged
the trip on my own, mostly winging it on a few notes and recommendations, I tried to create a
ride for myself. I tried to round up enough people for the shuttle, but there was only one other
man stranded like me. Together we watched for other stragglers as we stood near shops selling
outdoor gear and stuffed panda bears. I approached a tour group asking if I could hitch a ride
into town, and while the passengers were all for it, the guide objected, telling me it was against
company rules. A second flight arrived. I watched more tour groups pass and board coaches.
Smaller groups of passengers loaded into minivans. The rest had cars waiting. A third planeload
arrived. Before a proper breakfast I’d watched two hundred tourists pass, all headed to the same
place I was, all with transportation prearranged. The planes arriving from Chengdu, the tour
buses departing from the airport – these were working parts of a tourism machine built to
handle many thousands of people. I passed some time wondering why the machine seemed to
fail me. The other stranded passenger – he seemed to be on a doomed business trip –
reluctantly agreed to share one of the few, expensive taxis into town. The ride would cost half of
what I’d paid for my flight.

I made it into the Jiuzhaigou National Park the following day. I lined up at the ticket
window to pay my $50 entrance fee. I lined up at the park turnstiles. I lined up again for the
shuttle bus. I was moving among pods of tour groups that had a mind of their own. That mind
usually carried a small bullhorn, a flag at the end of a telescoping rod, and an ID card bearing
the words “Tour Guide.”7 The typical day-long visit to Jiuzhaigou begins with a bus ride directly
to Long Lake at the end of Zechawa Valley. The bus sped past the park’s famed lakes and
streams, along guard rails textured with concrete to look like tree stumps, and video camera
stanchions disguised as dead trees. Tourists talked furtively on the bus ride, as if on an elevator,
and then at Long Lake exploded into action: Nearly every visitor framed the lake in a camera.
One woman watched the park scenery pan across her LCD screen as she turned around in a
circle and then swung back to a spot she liked. “Here’s good,” she told her friend, who had been
waiting for instructions on where to pose. The scene was one that in the minds of many
observers has come to symbolize Chinese tourism: Dozens of Han tourists dressing in elaborate
“Tibetan” costumes, taking turns turn posing in front of the pristine mountain lake.

April is the spring shoulder season in Jiuzhaigou, and the park – famed for its water – was
at its driest, a time when many of its deep pools are dry to the bottom, and its emerald lakes are
set against a pale brown scrub instead of the lush green hillsides usually depicted in
photographs. But tourists continued to cascade through the park – from Long Lake, and from
the Primeval Forest at the head of Rize Valley – flowing along paved roads and boardwalks,

---

7Six in ten tour guides in China are female, most in their twenties. See: China Tourism News. Guanguo daoyou
renyuan, lüxingshe jingrenyuan renli ziyuan zhuangkuang diao yan [Human resources study on national tour
(accessed 11 April 2014).
which manage the traffic and minimize ecological impact. On the day of my visit, most people stuck to the designated paths, though at all times someone somewhere was off trail trying to get a better camera angle or crop out evidence of human presence. Next to one of the many scenic platforms in the park, a couple were having wedding photos taken while sitting on the grass by the lake. The photo shoot became a tourist attraction in itself, and eventually drew the attention of a park staff member fifty yards away, who yelled at the unlucky couple to get back on the trail, unleashing an uncouth barrage of Sichuanese curse words. Meanwhile, on the opposite bank and out of earshot, a group of people had climbed down from the boardwalk for a group photo at the waterline.

Despite inevitable rough edges to large-scale tourism in Jiuzhaigou, the park is an often-cited model for similar nature-based tourism destinations across China, including Yading. While the growth of tourism in Jiuzhaigou has had mixed effects for local Tibetans – increasing economic opportunities while eroding cultural practices (see Peng 1998) – the park has been cited as a success in the sustainable development of a nature destination (Li, Zhang, Liu and Xue 2006). But for local government officials keen on maximizing economic growth (see Blecher 1991), such as those in Daocheng County, I thought during my visit that what made the Jiuzhaigou model most attractive was simply the tourism machine, the capability of moving tens of thousands of paying tourists through the park.

One afternoon during my trip, I sat outside Jiuzhaigou’s main gate and let the end of the tourist day unfold. Over two hours, I watched over 80 bus loads of tourists arrive back at the park gate. On that off-season day, there were only about five thousand people in the park, and yet the end of the day still meant a near-constant stream of people exiting. At the main gate, pooling groups of tourists took turns having commemorative photos taken. Plush panda hats
bobbed above the crowd. Plastic bags that had carried instant noodles and water into the park were loaded with souvenirs on the way out. One man carried a set of yak horns. Price: $130.

On 2 October 2013, Jiuzhaigou hit what could be its upper limit of 40,000 visitors on a single day. The day would end with the collapse of transportation services within the park after a minor traffic jam and a resulting “chain reaction.” Thousands of tourists were reportedly stuck in the park for hours after the official closing time. And an unruly crowd gathered at the ticket windows requesting refunds.8 One photograph posted on the microblogging service Weibo showed tourists standing on the scale model of the park in the tourism center (Figure 4), angry giants trampling nature. An editorial cartoon (Figure 5) published after the event showed a scenic area (jingqu, 景区) dressed as a businessman devouring crowds and filling his pockets with cash, crying, “I’m still hungry!”

---


Stories like the National Day tourist “storming” (gongxian, 攻陷) of Jiuzhaigou belie the promises of package tourism, and are fair warning to domestic tourists wishing to avoid such chaos. The purpose for my own trip had not only been to better understand the Jiuzhaigou model – the particular way of developing a “natural” area for (sustainable) tourism – but also to observe and participate in being a tourist as I had done in Yading. Unlike the conversations that could unfold during a long journey to Yading, I found it difficult to have conversations among the fast-moving groups of people preoccupied with seeing and photographing. With the bus rides whisking me from viewing platform to viewing platform, from crowd to crowd, I felt rushed through the park, and felt frustrated at how unproductive the visit seemed.
Figure 4: Angry giants: tourists “storming” Jiuzhaigou.

Figure 5: “I’m still hungry!” (editorial cartoon).
The last evening of my trip, after returning from the park, I met Zhang Bowen and Kou Jieqing at the registration desk of the guesthouse where I was staying. Originally from Shandong, the couple lived in Beijing and I happened to meet them on their first trip ever as independent tourists, on a ten-day trip through Sichuan. While neither had ever bought a package tour themselves, they each had been on multiple group trips organized by their employers to places like Yangshuo, the Zhangjiajie Nature Reserve, Suzhou and Hangzhou. Their experience on those trips was fairly positive, since they were traveling with colleagues for team-building or as reward for performance (jiangli lüyou, 奖励旅游), and the company-organized tour paid the guides well enough that they agreed to skip the shopping stops along the way. (Such stops are the bread-and-butter for many guides, where shopping kickbacks would determine how much she or he got paid for the trip, sometimes sold at a loss to tourists.) However, for this trip, Zhang and Kou wanted to make an easy, relaxing time of it. Zhang said, “The biggest benefit of planning our own trip is that we have the freedom to decide our own schedule, even if it is more expensive to travel this way.”

Zhang and Kou’s primary planning resource was word-of-mouth (koubei, 口碑) on the Internet: They consulted online articles, checked travel web portals (lüyou pingdao, 旅游频道), discussion boards, company websites, and the Jiuzhaigou park website in planning their itinerary and making reservations. After looking at online reviews by “Internet friends” (wangyou pingjia, 网友评价), they decided against staying the whole time in one of the Tibetan guesthouses outside the park because they wanted a more comfortable hotel. But this was not for lack of interest: Zhang said, “We wanted to see how Tibetans live, their homes, and objects they used.” And in fact, their desire to have a more flexible itinerary paid off when they met a local villager inside the park and were able to arrange a night in a local home within the park gates. Staying overnight in the park is technically against the law and punishable by fine,
making Zhang and Kou – first time independent tourists – laid-back lawbreakers. But they were not the only ones exploiting lax enforcement within the park: One online article encourages tourists not to worry about the rules, advising that they likely won’t get caught and if they do they’d just have to pay for another day’s bus fee.9

When tourism scholar Pal Nyíri made a trip to Jiuzhaigou in 2003, his interest in the park was as an example of a scenic spot (lúyou jingdian/jingqu, 旅游景点/景区), a hegemonic, bounded, controlled tourism zone important because it has been invested with the cultural authority of the state (2005, xi, 36–54). Curiously, he didn’t clearly specify what exactly makes Jiuzhaigou an exemplary scenic spot, though by 2003, the park was already well developed, with boardwalks and buses inside the park, and a host of hotels and entertainment outside the park gate. Based in part on his observations in Jiuzhaigou, Nyíri argues against the observations of more nuanced observers of tourism in China (Walsh and Swain 2004; Oakes 1998) that tourism is homogenized to such an extent that Chinese tourists do not exhibit diversity in the ways that scenic spots such as Jiuzhaigou are consumed (Nyíri 2005, 83). Nyíri wrote, “For the Chinese tourist, there is no need for a ‘native guide’...since authentication of the experience comes from the professional tour guide, the travel agency, or the site management, as they are supposed to be more familiar with the cultural canon” (ibid., 68). The reason for this homogeneity, according to Nyíri, is because the state’s cultural authority has been built into scenic spots such as Jiuzhaigou.

While Nyíri was focused on the state’s vision for domestic tourism China (a package tourism model), he was well aware of the rise of independent tourism happening at the time of his research. He wrote, “There is little question...that Chinese tourism will become more

---

individual and differentiated with time” (ibid., 91), and already there is a “small but increasing number of mostly young Chinese do choose to travel on their own. ...[T]his is called ‘self-service travel’ to distinguish it from ordinary, group travel” (ibid., 86). However, in the population where he expected to find a more critical stance toward scenic spots, Nyíri only found complicity. Commenting on a Chinese backpacker guidebook, Nyíri wrote,

Whereas Western backpacker discourse distinguishes itself from the mainstream tourist discourse by being down-to-earth and even cynical about tourist activities, the Chinese backpacker language is highly poetic, focused on experiencing the sublime, with no room for reflection on tourism or irony. ...Even though sites of mass tourism, with their development and crowds, seem to stand for everything the authors of these books want to avoid, they...do not criticize or satirize these sites and their practices the way their Western counterparts do (ibid., 89).

The portrayal of Chinese tourists – “mass” and independent tourists alike – as homogenous, unreflective, and unironic is unfortunate. More importantly, it is simply wrong. Nyíri was apparently looking for evidence of direct challenges “to the commodified presence of state symbols” (ibid., 98), though such overt criticism is uncommon in China, whether from travel writers and publishers who have to deal with the state censorship process, or from citizens out for a bit of R&R. Nyíri implies that Chinese independent tourists should strike an explicitly cynical or satirical stance toward scenic spots and the state tourism development project, and interprets the apparent lack of such a stance as evidence of the state’s hegemonic cultural authority.

While searching for evidence of a critical stance toward scenic spots among Chinese tourists, Nyíri puts little attention to them in his field research, letting implicitly state-sanctioned publications stand in for independent tourist discourse. This approach makes
Nyíri himself complicit in the very homogenization he criticizes. In uncritically adopting scenic spots as the organizing analytic of his study, Nyíri has appropriated the categories of the Chinese state and used them as the basis for a critique of Chinese tourists. As a result he perpetuates the marginalization of tourism practices that fall outside that system. And yet the state’s own recognition of the age of independent tourism is a reason to question the robustness of the state-centric scenic spot model. Like most of the tourists I met during my research, Zhang and Kou were not traveling with a guidebook, but rather with gōnglùe, copies of peer-produced travel strategies researched on the Internet. Nyíri’s analysis of guidebook discourse misses out on the fact that the decisions being made by independent tourists are based on new kinds of geographic knowledge practices, operating outside the state tourism system.

I agree with Nyíri that, “[package] tourism emerged...as part of a state-led promotion of a service sector modeled after Western postindustrial consumer economies, at a time when the ‘modern citizen’ was gradually being recast as consumer” (2005, 70, 98). However, we differ in our interpretation of how this effort has unfolded. Where Nyíri saw a retrenchment of state cultural authority through tourism development and scenic spots, I see the state’s attempts at ordering domestic tourism as one of the primary influences on the rise of independent tourism and of ordering effects that have actually come to challenge the dominant package tourism/scenic spot model. While some scholars have seen new leisure practices such as backpack travel as the emergence of a new public sphere (Lim 2008; Zhang 2008), Nyíri takes the opposite position, seeing tourists as completely coopted by the state project. To my mind, both of these approaches are flawed insofar as they operate on a binary state/society model that does not sufficiently address the interaction between them. Domestic tourism and other leisure-culture changes in the 1990s were not simply a response to party-state strategies of
social and cultural paternalism, but rather reflect changes in governing strategy, changes that welcome, encourage, and even require the responsible decision making of a modern citizenry. On a single, loosely-organized research trip to Jiuzhaigou I happened to meet first-time independent tourists who’d broken the park rules to get a more individualized experience of local Tibetan life, an experience that has not been an important part of the nature’s park’s production as a tourist site. If tourist stays inside Jiuzhaigou were truly threatening to state goals, the rules would certainly be better enforced, and Zhang and Kou seemed to treat the experience as no big deal. But the lack of an ironic or resistant stance on their part is not necessarily evidence that they simply go along with the cultural script. Their experience also indicates that not all Chinese are satisfied with tourist experiences as ordered by the state, and these kinds of tactical (Certeau 1984) departures from the supposed cultural script should be recognized as a practice of making their own place within the orderings of the state. This also squarely challenges the assertion that Chinese tourists can be thought of as a homogenous or unreflective population. They may not match the explicitly ironic stance seen in their Western counterparts, to whom they are often compared, but there is more going on than unthinking mass action.

The age of independent tourism

In the 1990s, state attitudes regarding tourism completed a transformation from being a suspect ideology and a bourgeois practice to being an exemplary practice at the heart of the new service economy. The state’s attention to “culture” shifted from a focus on ideology to a capital resource oriented around leisure. With legislative changes that established a standard work week and weekend (in 1995) and a national holiday schedule (in 1999), the state had in effect created the social and economic circumstances for a new age of leisure, one that paradoxically
exhibits elements of both freedom and control, of self-determination and discipline (Rojek 2010, 60). As Chinese began to have more leisure choices and more resources to put toward them, the tourism industry took off quickly, and by the end of the 1990s would be driving the move to more independent travel practices. In turning to leisure culture as a new strategy of governing (Wang 2001), the central government facilitated an institutional shift that opened possibilities for tourism practices that package tourism was not built to accommodate. In pushing for a new service economy that embraced leisure and culture, the central government established conditions that lead simultaneously to a boom in package tourism and to the spread of new tourism desires that would challenge the managed industry the state sought to govern.

While built on the mass-tourism industry foundation Deng envisioned, the emerging age of independent tourism would increasingly come to resemble Deng’s self-confident pose on a mountain path, an individual citizen standing confidently in the cultural and natural territory that defined the nation. Ideological changes concurrent with the establishment of the tourism industry by the state helped spur a huge market for domestic package tourism, which helped lay the foundation for new tourism desires and practices that would exceed what the package tourism model could offer: On a national scale, the domestic tourism industry broke down the social and ideological biases against leisure travel and put into place an extensive tourism infrastructure. These state-induced conditions became a jumping off point for citizens interested in taking a more active role in touring the nation.

Beginning in the 1990s, pacing the expansion of China’s service sector economy – from 34 percent of national GDP in 1992 to 44 percent10 – personal incomes have grown, due to rising salaries as well as increased income from real estate and other investments. While tourism as a

---

state development priority arrived in China’s smaller administrative areas in the early 1990s, these interrelated economic changes (a larger service industry, a broader consumer base) have helped make more tourists in China’s smaller cities and towns. With the changes to the hukou (household registration, 户籍) system that began in the early 1980s, state controls over the mobility of Chinese loosened, opening an age of rural migrant labor (Chan 2009) as well as an age of domestic tourism. The hukou system remains important, and it still limits access to education and other city services for migrant workers and certain kinds of real estate investments by wealthier Chinese. However, in terms of domestic tourism, China’s Han middle class is largely free from the bureaucracy. They need no permits to travel domestically to places such as Tibet, which remain restricted to foreign travelers. The social and economic changes that converged by the late 1990s (see Klingberg 2007) reworked everyday life in China enough that the desire for distinctive, individualized tourism experiences shot past the institutional capabilities of the tourism industry. By the 2000s, tourism had become such a naturalized, ‘normal’ part of life and important enough to the economy that the major economic concern was less about how to develop domestic tourism than on how to keep it going when it flagged (Klingberg and Oakes 2012).

We can also track the spread of independent tourism through changes in the fragmented industries it touches. For example, greater numbers of tourists found greater leisure mobility through improvements in national transportation infrastructure, which facilitated increasingly easy travel to more remote places. Since reforms began in 1979, China has roughly doubled the total length of its railway system, with most of that growth coming in the past twenty years, and 10 percent of the total 62,000 miles being high-speed rail.\footnote{Xinhua. China boosts railway development, more investment expected. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-08/08/c_132612806.htm (accessed 24 June 2014).} With the Qinghai-Tibet railway...
and rail spurs built from major cities, train travel is now possible to more remote parts of western China. Likewise, China is spending $230 billion on its airline industry (Fallows 2012), with over 55 new airports to be constructed by 2015,\(^\text{12}\) among which Kangding and Daocheng (the world’s third and first highest airports, respectively) have already opened. Perhaps most importantly for independent tourism is the construction and improvement of roads. In the fifteen years since 1998, the total length of China’s highways grew tenfold (from 8700 to nearly 85,000 miles), though more importantly for regional tourism is the tripled total length of officially-designated paved roadways in China (from nearly 800,000 to over 2.5 million miles).\(^\text{13}\)

For Yading, these road improvements will likely mean even greater seasonal spikes in tourism: From the north, the improvement of National Highway 318, China’s longest highway running from Shanghai to the border with Nepal – 800 miles longer than the drive from New York City to Los Angeles – has become a priority. And the long-rumored improvement of Provincial Roads 216 and 217 would better connect Daocheng and Yading with Yunnan’s humungous tourism economy to the south.

The growth in railways, roads, and airports has been matched by increased demand on this infrastructure. Over the ten year period beginning in 2002, the number of passengers carried annually by China’s trains increased from 1 to 1.8 billion, and the total miles traveled also nearly doubled – to 981 billion passenger-miles.\(^\text{14}\) After 1998, passenger mileage on China’s


roadways increased nearly threefold, and air passenger miles grew nearly six times, from 8 to over 45 million passenger-miles.\(^{15}\)

The type of lodging available to China’s domestic tourists has expanded beyond high-priced star-rated hotels and cheap guesthouses (zhaodaisuo, 招待所), with economy hotel brands such as Jinjiang Inn and Home Inn expanding to fill the growing middle market, providing clean, standardized services at lower prices with easy online booking. Over five years, from 2003 to 2008, for example, Jinjiang Inn – where Zhang and Kou were heading after their visit to Jiuzhaigou – expanded from only one city (Shanghai) to 89 cities; and during the same period, Home Inn grew from 10 to 471 hotels nationally (Qin, Adler and Cai 2012, 45). In 1998, building on the informal network of guesthouses and hostels serving foreign budget travelers, the first internationally-affiliated\(^{16}\) youth hostel was opened in Guangdong (Cai 2002).

We can further intuit the spread of independent tourism – particularly “self-driving” tourism (zijiache, 自驾车) – in the growth of private car ownership. The number of private cars on the roads in China today is 16 times higher than it was in 2000, topping 90 million privately owned cars and buses.\(^{17}\) And ownership patterns are spreading from major cities into surrounding areas. For example, in 2006 over 90 percent of Sichuan’s private cars were registered in the capital Chengdu; in 2013 Chengdu accounted for only 70 percent.\(^{18}\) A car rental industry has emerged as well, with corporations muscling into the haphazard landscape of small-time car renters. eHi Car Services (Yihai Zuche, 一嗨租车), founded in 2006 in Shanghai


\(^{16}\)This report referred to affiliations with the International Youth Hostel Federation.

\(^{17}\)China Data Online. Number of civil motor vehicles owned, under “National statistics.” chinadataonline.org (accessed 13 May 2014).

and China Auto Rental (Shenzhou Zuche, 神州租车), founded in 2007 in Beijing were the largest and most visible national car rental chains as of 2011, with a national networks and standardized prices. Like many leading travel services, they distinguished themselves by having an online presence.

Travel publishing is one of the more obvious indications of greater popular interest in independent tourism. Independent tourism oriented guidebooks boomed at the turn of the 21st century, with the publication of Xizang niupishu in 2000 and the Zanglingyang series’s first guidebook (to Tibet) in 2001, and the emergence of one of the first independent domestic tourism guidebooks covering the entire nation in 2002. The heyday for these guidebooks would be short-lived as the Internet and emerging social media networks transformed the distribution of travel information.

Perhaps the single most important change that directly facilitated the popularity of independent tourism was the establishment of consumer Internet services. China’s first international Internet connection (to the US) was established in 1994, and within a year service was being provided through consumer telephone networks.19 By 1998, the national average for Internet use was still a fraction of a percent, though in Beijing it was four percent, 23 times the national average (Harwit 2004). It was in those early years that Beijing-based Internet users built new social connections around special interests, such as environmentalism (see Yang 2003) and outdoor recreation and travel (see Lim 2008). With the reduction of prices in 1999 (Harwit 2004), and as Internet use expanded in other cities, similar connections were established, leading to a nationally-expanding network of citizens sharing new interests. What bulletin-boards were for users in the 1990s, blogs and websites became in the early 2000s, and

---

social networking – Weibo and Weixin especially – became in the 2010s: vital information and knowledge networks for new interest groups. With the recent surge in mobile Internet users – 80 percent of China’s Internet users access the Internet on a mobile device – China’s Internet use is close to 50 percent of the population. These new communication technologies have fundamentally changed the way information travels in China and expanded opportunities for social connections and information-sharing, not only for those better off but also for the “rest” of China (Cartier, Castells and Qiu 2005).

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the age of independent tourism has already had an impact on China’s travel agencies. One of the ways agencies have responded is by offering new tourism products and services better adapted to independent tourism demand. This has meant both new business models, such as companies like Qiongyou that focus on FIT travel, and changes to existing models, such as Tianya, a venerable bulletin board service that now integrates travel services.

A number of other changes could serve as indicators of independent tourism’s popularity, such as the booming outdoor gear industry or photographic equipment sales. But taken together all of the changes discussed here indicate that independent tourism may be an emerging tourism system in itself. The state tourism industry has not been silently guiding these changes, but it has recognized the changing market, and has already shown signs of responding. These changes have been put into practice by Chinese seeking new ways of spending leisure time. And domestic travel preferences are already being reflected in China’s outbound international tourism: One recent study found that half of the Shanghai residents surveyed would travel abroad independently, rather than as part of a tour package (Zhang, Ma and Qu 2012).

The age of independent tourism is not simply a change limited to the tourism industry, nor is it a turn or break along a linear line of development – a paradigm shift or a revolution – that
leaves package tourism behind. Rather, this is a composite age, with changes in the ways the state envisions and manages tourism and the ways independent tourists put tourism into practice, in how the state values its citizens and how well individual and collective Chinese desires match those of the state. If Deng’s southern tours in 1979 and 1992 bookended the tourism revival in China, the subsequent twenty years – from 1992 to the present – should be recognized as a period of reversal, when the state’s initial success in establishing a domestic package tourism industry became increasingly challenged by independent tourism. By encouraging tourism and touristic attitudes in its citizens, the state laid the foundation for tourism demands that the industry was never structured to provide.

What is independent tourism? How do we know it when we see it? When I refer to independent tourism, I am referring to the popular Chinese term zizhu lüyou (自助旅游), or the shorter form, zizhuyou (自助游). The basic meaning here is that this is a form of tourism (lüyou, 旅游) based on helping or assisting (zhu, 助) oneself (zi, 自): In English the term has been translated more literally as “self-service tourism” (Nyíri 2005, 86), though I prefer to translate the term as “independent tourism,” which better reflects both the specific practices of this form of tourism (the independence from expert tourism services) and the different relationship to the state tourism project (independence of the state system of package tourism and scenic spots). By 2002, “independent tourism” was already all over the Internet, in the media, in bookstores – and it has been referred to as a national fever in news stories each year.20 Zizhu lüyou as I refer

---

to it does not include tourism industry categories such as sanke (FIT, 散客) or ziyouxing (free tourism, 自由行), which may offer some self-service options for tourists, but which remain dependent on the expertise of the formal tourism industry.

Zizhu lüyou does not refer to a single kind of tourism, but is a general term for a range of tourist practices. The earliest, and most well-documented form of independent tourism in China is backpack travel (beibao lüyou, 背包旅游), which tends to rely on local transportation and budget lodging and followed the example of foreign backpackers in China. Most of the tourists I write about here are backpackers, though they took varied approaches to their trip, some seeking a more relaxing and comfortable trip, others interested in enduring more hardship (xinku, 辛苦). This is partly the result of choices I made in the field: Backpack tourism to Yading runs consistently through the year, while other forms of tourism are either too infrequent (such a long distance cycling) or too concentrated around holiday times (such as self-drive tours). I found it more effective to talk to tourists already in Yading than to try to identify tourists in advance, though I was fortunate to meet some tourists, like Zhou Liang, along the way. One popular term for backpackers is lüyou (驴友) – literally “donkey friends” (see Lim 2008) – a homonym that plays off the word for travel companion (lüyou, 旅友). Backpack travel in this sense is close to backpacking in the outdoors (huwai yundong, 户外运动), where carrying your gear is required and where more mental and physical endurance is expected. Zhang and Kou insisted they were not backpackers because of their desire for more comfort; backpackers to their mind were more interested in the outdoors and better able to deal with a tougher trip (chiku, 吃苦).

There are many other activities that fall under the “independent tourism” umbrella: hiking tourism (tubu lüyou, 徒步旅游), bicycle tourism (zixingche lüyou, 自行车旅游), adventure travel (tansuo lüyou, 探险旅游) and other forms of special-interest travel (tezhong lüyou, 特种
The age of independent tourism

旅游), such as birdwatching (guanniao, 观鸟) or mountaineering (dengshan, 登山). One of the most recognizable forms of independent tourism is zijiayou (自驾车游), or self-drive travel (by automobile, motorcycle, or off-road vehicle), probably second only to backpacking. Many of the tourists I spoke with in Yading had arrived as part of a driving tour, with multiple carloads of friends making the trip from Chengdu to Yading. I saw many of these tourist caravans making their way across Kham: the columns of sedans and SUVs were immediately recognizable against the usual traffic of motorcycles, tractors, transport trucks, and military vehicles. The tourist convoys were the leisure equivalent of the military convoys making their way into Tibet: the vehicles often displayed a number marking their place in the order, and two-way radios kept the convoy in communication. There was usually a trip leader (duizhang, 队长) in the lead car, and multiple GPS units glowing on dashboards. What all of these variations of independent tourism share in common is the more active role taken on by the tourists themselves in planning and embarking on their own journey. Not every tourist on every trip is as equally engaged in organizing travel, and in some ways these independent tour groups might resemble a new form of package tourism. However, what is fundamentally different is that tourism has become a more individualized practice that depends on geographic knowledge generated by other tourists through their own travels rather than tourism experts planning out a tourism experience.

In English, “independent tourism” may bring to mind a more culturally sensitive and ecologically sustainable form of tourism that does not dominate a local area, economically, culturally, or environmentally. But as most observers would likely agree, independent tourism as it has emerged in China is not necessarily a “better” form of travel. It may hold the potential for encouraging more informed and sensitive tourism on the part of domestic Chinese tourists (especially in ethnic minority areas), but the desire and ability to travel on one’s own is no measure of such sensitivity or sustainability.
What the popularity of independent tourism does indicate is that *zizhu* is not simply a trendy new buzzword, but a sign that the individual has taken on a new importance in China. “Self-Reliance,” Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous essay, is translated by mainland publishers as *Zizhu* (《自助》) or *Lun zizhu* (《论自助》), and it may be tempting to retranslate *zizhu* back through Emerson’s classic account of American individualism. However, the rise of the individual in China doesn’t mean the rise of a kind of individualism that prizes nonconformity. Rather, the rise of the individual in China can be seen in terms of greater individualization, a process of disembedding individuals from certain social constraints (family, community, class), requiring greater responsibility and self-determination from individuals to maintain a social order, and requiring the exercising of apparently non-conformist choice and freedom that in the end assures a paradoxical individual conformity (Yan 2010, 274–275). Nyíri was insensitive to this tension, and in seeing the state as having successfully coopted the individual he ignores the “disembedding” aspects of tourism in China, not to mention the fact that tourism anywhere is far too fragmented and disordered a system for there to be such precise cultural control.

The dichotomous state/society thinking that pervades Nyíri’s work reduces the political possibilities of tourism to a matter of the state’s success at establishing cultural conformity. This is as as problematic in concluding that tourists are uncritical conformers (as Nyíri does) as it is in concluding that tourism can establish an autonomous public sphere set apart from the state (see Zhang 2008). Independent tourism offers a chance to see more clearly the point of friction between contemporary Chinese desires (for mobility, choice, and freedom) and the party-state’s ongoing effort to manage and control the population by encouraging self-management and self-control (Yan 2010, 288, 290). And instead of demanding an account of how things “are” in China, an awareness of the dialectical tension between state projects and lived experience
demands an account of how things work in China, of ongoing processes of social ordering through tourism.

From the point of view of the tourism industry, domestic tourism in China has predominantly been what some scholars have called the “formal” tourism sector comprised by the registered and regulated enterprises with some degree of political influence (Wahnschafft 1982, 431). China’s formal tourism sector has largely been an industry dominated by package tourism services (state-regulated travel agencies, star-rated hotels, and officially-designated scenic spots), which form the basis for statistical measurement and the analysis of tourism as part of the national economy. This perspective offers a starting point for understanding independent tourism in terms of what it is often defined against.

To some, domestic tourism happening outside the formal industry might suggest an informal tourism sector, one without legal status and that is not measured or regulated (ibid.). In China, as the state has become progressively more engaged in standardizing and managing domestic tourism (and legislating against informal tourism), the informal tourism sector is less pronounced than in other Asian nations.\(^{21}\) The formal-informal dichotomy, therefore, is less useful in understanding domestic independent tourism in China partly because of the pervasiveness of central state regulation through local Party organizations, but also because independent tourists to varying degrees rely on the formal, regulated tourism system (such as a licensed guesthouse, a long-distance bus ticket, or an entry ticket). The key differences are illuminated less by economic and political structures than by concrete tourism practices.

\(^{21}\)Thailand is particularly well-represented in studies of informal tourism (see Wahnschafft 1982).
“Mass tourism” is used in Chinese- and English-language scholarship alike, and is referred to in Chinese tourism scholarship as *dazhong lüyou* (大众旅游; see Dai and Xia 2009). In both cases, mass tourism is an imprecise term, corresponding neither to an industry category, nor to an analytically precise concept (see Vainikka 2013). A better specified way of describing tourism as envisioned by the state is package tourism (baojia lüyou, 包价旅游), involving the purchase of major travel components (transportation, accommodation or other components) from a travel retailer (Hyde and Lawson 2003, 13). From the point of view of the tourist, package tourism works on a fairly standard model: Tourists buy a product. They purchase a trip organized by a travel agency with a predetermined itinerary and fixed schedule, that is run by a tour guide, who acts as an expert source of information, manages the route and pace, and often encourages further spending at scheduled stops at shopping centers. This has been the primary model for China’s tourism industry, and the boom in domestic tourism would not have happened without it (Figure 6). However, independent tourism was not simply a clean break from the package tourism industry. It was enabled by it, and still works through its infrastructures, even as independent tourism has catalyzed changes within the industry.

In practice, the dividing lines between mass and independent tourist are indistinct. In Yading I found “independent” tourists that had simply joined a group put together by a friend or colleague and were only too happy to let someone else organize their trip for them. And I discovered tour operators that coordinated group travel for tourists seeking a less mass-market experience. This led to odd scenes at Yading’s trailhead when a tourism coach would unload a few dozen backpackers ready for an outdoor trek. Defining independent as *not* mass or group tourism does little to specify the term, since independent forms of travel are happening on a mass scale around the world. And to define independent tourism as the opposite of mass tourism invites assumptions about the homogeneity of tourists or the tourist experience. When

I refer to mass tourism, therefore, it is meant to simply describe large numbers of tourists, with no differentiation implied between package and independent tourists.

Statistical reports provide another option for understanding independent tourism. China’s tourism industry is tuned to the statistical measure of person-trips and profits, though government officials will admit that the numbers are fundamentally unreliable (see Rawski 2001), as officials in Chengdu and Yading confirmed in interviews. Tourism has typically been measured by gate receipts, such as in Yading, though there is obvious variance in how tourism is counted: In Daocheng County, where Yading is by far the most popular tourist site, total tourist arrivals are multiple times higher county-wide than the numbers counted through Yading’s gate receipts, so other criteria – perhaps hotel registrations – are being used. Currently, the CNTA’s definition of a tourist (youke, 游客) is a Chinese national traveling within the country:

---

22Statistical reporting on tourism is a topic of public discussion: One report by the CNTA posed the central questions of the debate: “What kind of behavior counts as ‘tourism’? What kind of person counts as a ‘tourist’?” (Zhang 2011).
The age of independent tourism

...for sightseeing, holiday, visiting friends and relatives, medical care, meeting, or taking part in economic, cultural, sports or religious activities. Their purposes of travel are not for remuneration from [these] activities... Domestic visitors include domestic (overnight) tourists and domestic same-day visitors (GLYS 2013, 129, original in English).

Besides being broad, this definition does not distinguish package tourists from independent tourists. Neither the CNTA nor the Bureau of Statistics defines or measures independent tourism. This may be due to the fact that even up to the turn to developing domestic tourism in the early 1990s, nearly all Chinese traveled independently of travel agencies and package tours (Zhang 1989, 54). In the late 1980s, 90 percent of Chinese were reported to be traveling independently of travel agencies (Zhang 1989, 90). In the early 1990s, with the state’s new push to develop domestic tourism, package tourism took off: In 1993, 8.2 million tourists bought package tours, and in 1995, only two years later, that number jumped to 34.5 million. Despite this significant growth, nearly 95 percent of domestic tourists were still traveling independently (Zhang 1997, 567). This percentage hasn’t really changed in the years since: In 2004, nearly 90 percent of China’s domestic tourists were traveling without the organizational help of travel agencies (Wen and Gong 2008, 60).

On one hand this is an important insight, since it shows that Chinese tourism is not simply about package tourism. The story of Chinese tourism as a package tourism industry and of Chinese tourists as preferring tour group travel may be the greater historical anomaly than the new age of independent tourism. The state tourism project has so dominated domestic tourism in China that independent tourism rather than package tourism is what seems remarkable. But this is also unilluminating, since if most Chinese travel independently, and always have, what is the basis for the changes we are seeing? To say most (90 percent) of Chinese are independent
tourists is to speak of tourism in a broad sense, one that even if it reflects the reality does little to explain the changes we are seeing in the age of independent tourism.

The notion that package and independent tourism are related – born of the same age, on a continuum of practices – hints at the problematic nature of measuring the change statistically. Many more Chinese are traveling by package tour, but as a percentage, just as many more are traveling on their own. Despite the tremendous growth in domestic tourism since the mid-1980s, we can see that the growth in package tourism (which often stands for “how Chinese travel”) simply follows the overall trend in expanding opportunities to travel for more Chinese.

Independent tourism has an iceberg-like presence in China’s tourism industry. The popularity of domestic independent tourism is hard to miss, both in the converging changes discussed previously, and in the relative (in terms of the state system) heterogeneity of tourism experiences across China. It is clear that more Chinese have the desire and the resources to travel in a self-organized way, that businesses have begun to capitalize on it, and even that the state tourism industry itself is adapting to a huge shift in the domestic tourism market. And yet to a tourism industry that prizes quantification, a potentially huge part of domestic Chinese tourism is statistically unknown. Since this change does not seem to show up quantitatively, my approach has been to try to get a qualitative sense of change.

Another third option in understanding independent tourism is to consider how scholars have grappled with the idea. There have been few attempts at defining independent tourism by Chinese scholars, who usually work in close connection to the government tourism project. This invariably reflects the size and structure of the state tourism industry and academic research silos in China, but also reflects the fundamental problem: Despite passing references to independent tourism throughout the 1990s and calls as early as 2002 to recognize independent tourism as a part of tourism in China (see Chen 2011), there is still a dearth of good Chinese
scholarship. In 2008, a brief Chinese-language academic article reported that from 1979 to 2006 less than thirty research publications matched the keyword *zizhuyou* (independent tourism), and pointed out the sharp gap between scholarly research and the current state of tourism (Wen and Gong 2008, 60). As an initial step toward addressing this gap, the writers sought to define independent tourism by identifying a common element in the literature they surveyed. Four of these early definitions were quoted:23

Independent tourism usually refers to tourists possessing their own knowledge about their destinations and freely choosing their itinerary (Lu 1998).

Independent tourism is organized and implemented by tourists themselves (Chen 2001).

Independent tourism is a fashionable way to travel, with the goal of expressing individuality, being close to nature, and relaxing mind and body. [It is] the completely independent selection and arrangement of tourist activities without the accompaniment of a guide through the entire trip (Chen 2011).

Independent tourists are tourists who arrange travel on their own, focusing on a participatory experience and a relaxing way to travel (Zhang 2005).

The article argues that these early attempts to define independent tourism share a single common point – the fact that tourists plan or organize travel themselves. This is the essential difference between independent tourism and package tourism. (The other terms commonly counterposed with independent tourism – mass tourism or group tourism – are less specific when it comes to this distinction; all the more reason to avoid them.) The authors go on to define independent tourists as “tourists who do not buy an inclusive package tourism product and arrange all or part of their tourism according to their own wishes” (Wen and Gong 2008, 62).

---

23 Author translations.
In the English-language literature, the notion of independent tourism can be traced back to early tourism studies. Many early approaches at understanding the sociological importance of tourism attempted to understand tourism through tourist types, identifying, for example, “non-institutionalized” tourists such as drifters or explorers (Cohen 1972) or wanderers (Vogt 1976), and later as upscale tramping tourists (Adler 1985), budget travelers (Riley 1988) and backpackers (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). However, despite the existence of potential models, foreign scholars have on the whole paid little attention to Chinese tourists. Some recent studies of tourism in China potentially well positioned to address aspects of domestic tourism (including independent tourism) were mainly concerned with foreign tourists (Notar 2006; Kolás 2008), a perplexing oversight given the extent to which domestic tourism has grown in China. At times, when domestic tourists have been included, they have come under cultural suspicion as naifs (see Nyíri’s comments above) or doppelgängers of Westerners (Vasantkumar 2014). Sometimes tourists are simply excluded from the matter entirely (Chio 2014).

Most of the attention paid to independent tourists in China has been in the form of backpackers (Sicoff, Alos and Shrestha 2003; Nyíri 2005; Lim 2008; Shepherd 2008; Zhang 2008; Vasantkumar 2009; Kristensen 2013; Vasantkumar 2014), though not all independent tourists are, or would self-identify as, backpackers, and there is a much wider range of practices that remain to be studied, especially that of “self-drive” tourism (zijiache, 自驾车). Of all the recent work on Chinese tourism, Chris Vasantkumar’s stands out in its attention to elements of independent tourism. Vasantkumar observed that since the early 2000s we have seen a shift from “theme park fever” focused on museums and ethnic culture parks to a “guidebook moment” focused on travel guides, the Internet, and scenic spots (2014, 58). I agree that there has been a qualitative change in tourism practices in China, though I think we have yet to see a complete shift from past modes of tourism or tourist subjectivities. Rather, I see the development of independent
tourism as having important continuities with the past and as having an ongoing relationship with other modes of tourism in China. The continuities with the past are more clear when we are able to recognize that the state’s tourism project is historically specific, and that incremental changes have transformed independent tourism into a specific, highly desirable leisure practice.

Vasantkumar’s second important insight about domestic tourism in China is that “idioms of discovery are coming to function alongside those of confirmation in the organization of... independent travel” (2009). This challenges Nyíri’s dismissal of independent tourists as worthwhile research subjects, and refocuses the discussion on how and why the desires and practices of independent tourism might be important. Whereas Nyíri’s scenic spot model portrayed domestic tourists as seeking cultural confirmation by following a state-sanctioned sequence of didactic tourist sites (2005, 93), Vasantkumar argued this approach overplayed uniformity of domestic Chinese tourism. I agree with Vasantkumar that discovery has become a key metaphor for new tourism practices. This dissertation develops this idea further by focusing on the practices that have made that metaphor apt. However, perhaps lacking an alternative model for the spatiality of tourism in China, Vasantkumar framed his study of independent tourism in terms of Nyíri’s scenic spot model. It is worth reflecting on how appropriate the scenic spot model is to studies like this, and to be cautious of the ways that it can be transferred uncritically outside of Chinese state discourse and official scholarship. Chapter Three presents an alternative model for thinking through these issues.

The defining characteristic of independent tourism is that it is a practice of self-organized leisure travel counterposed to package tourism that is organized by experts (Tsaur, Yen and Chen 2010, 1038). To say that independent tourism is simply not package tourism would simply be to describe independent tourism in the broad sense, one that might describe 90 percent of domestic tourists. Independent tourism is significant because of what is happening in a more
specific population of domestic tourists, one we can better define by examining three additional factors hinted at in the preceding discussion.

First, the practice of independent tourism is the practice of a relatively new and exemplary social group. The age of independent tourism and the development of a service-sector economy needed to sustain economic growth parallels a concurrent national “citizenship” project aimed at developing a model citizenry autonomous enough to choose what to consume (and drive the market economy) and responsible for governing themselves (and support the political status quo) (Tomba 2009, 592–593). Citizenship in this sense does not stand apart from the state, but is an integral part of it, with certain economic, social, and cultural benefits, but ultimately bears a responsibility to participate in social programs important for nation-making (Keane 2001, 2).

While the reversal of domestic tourism in China might seem to come from outside the state-managed industry (see Xiao 2011), it was in fact a key part of a larger state project to engineer that subjectivity in a modern Chinese citizenry imbued with the economic and cultural power to choose products and practices that the state does not provide. Tomba’s definition of the middle class describes well the independent tourists I met during my fieldwork; they are, “a large, loosely defined social group that shares the potential or the experience of enhanced access to resources (education, information, and wealth) and rapid upward social mobility” (Tomba 2009, 592). The state’s prized citizenry – the urban “middle class” – is not only compatible with but fundamental to China’s transition to state capitalism (ibid., 596). However, we should keep in mind that 35 percent of China’s domestic tourists (in the broad sense) are rural residents, a sign that domestic tourism is not simply an urban phenomenon. While “urban middle class,” or China’s “urban natives” (Fan 2002), might correspond to most of China’s independent tourists, the turn to independent tourism is not simply a change happening at the higher socioeconomic levels of China’s most vibrant cities. I met tourists from many smaller cities across China, not
only the eastern coastal areas (see Vasantkumar 2009), and there is no reason to think that tourism is anything less desirable than shopping or any other consumer practice to China’s migrant workers, whose desire to work their way out of poverty grows along with the desire to consume (Pun 2004, 487). Still, independent tourism is significant as a popular leisure practice of the nation’s exemplary citizens (Bakken 2000; Tomba 2009; Klingberg and Oakes 2012).

Second, independent tourism is a new spatial practice of tourism. The rise of independent tourism has often been framed in terms of the scenic spot model, a state-envisioned tourism geography. This geography was in large part determined by the desire to concentrate tourism, to bring many tourists to a single place and reap the economic benefits of an easily managed destination. While independent tourism certainly works within and around this system, it has also spilled over this bounded, controlled tourism geography. Independent tourism seeks out new tourism destinations, whether in untouristed or everyday corners of cities, or in rural and western areas, from rural home stays (nongjiale, 农家乐) in the near suburbs, to the mountain landscapes of overland trips through ethnic minority areas across the country. This change has required new tourism skills – new practices of acting, living and inhabiting place (Certeau 1984, 96; Billig 1995, 48), of enskillment and knowing how to travel (Ingold 2000, 36–37; Merleau-Ponty 2002, 159). Independent tourism in this sense can also be seen as a territorializing practice, of tourists making a place for themselves in the nation through tourism, as opposed to playing out predetermined cultural experiences through an closed network of scenic spots.

Third, independent tourism is a generative knowledge practice. Independent tourism is researched and organized by tourists themselves, and usually relies on the advice and information of peers found online in discussion groups and blogs. Without experts to guide travel, the possibility of self-organized tourism experiences requires new knowledge practices
and skills. No form of tourism is simply the passive consumption of existing information, though independent tourism highlights more plainly the deep interconnections between practices of tourism and knowledge. The research and planning that goes into independent tourism is more engaged with knowledge about certain places and itineraries than is typical of package tourism, and this leads to different kinds of knowledge resulting from tourism, a different knowing how to travel and live in new places. Independent tourism is not simply the consumption of state-inscribed knowledge, but a creative process that generates geographic knowledge of its own, part of a broader process of coming to know places, regions, and the nation itself in new ways.

*Ordering exploration*

Over the past two decades a new tourism ordering has emerged in China, one that is recognizably different than the state-dominated ordering of the tourism revival. While it may still be too early to call this a new age of tourism in China, there are real changes taking place, and we can already recognize independent tourism’s new ordering effects. This new ordering is behind what has been called the “age of independent tourism” (Xiao 2011), and can be understood as broader terms as an ordering of exploration.

The popularity of independent tourism in China today presents a challenge to the scenic spot model of domestic tourism, as more Chinese seek out tourist experiences that the package tourism model does not provide, and that the state-ordered network of tourist sites cannot fully satisfy. The age of independent tourism can be thought of in thematic terms as the emergence of a national interest in exploring place, in popular tourism practices focused not simply on standardized experiences of tourist sites invested with state cultural authority, but increasingly
on experiences of place that surpass the state’s ability to calculate and control, even as these practices are embedded in that project.

The national turn to exploring place (like the tourism revival) has been a process of ordering, though (unlike the tourism revival) one in which the desires and practices of tourists themselves have had more significant ordering effects (Franklin 2004, 278). While the actions of the state – central and local – remain important in organizing and managing domestic tourism, the actions of tourists themselves have taken on a greater role. This is particularly true of independent tourists, who have put into practice a form of tourism that de-emphasizes expert authority and values self-organized “exploration.” These practices have had ordering effects of their own, and this dissertation is an attempt at identifying and assessing these effects.

Approaching independent tourism as a process of socio-technological ordering – rather than as a finished state of order (Law 1994, 1–2) – is a way to approach tourism as an embedded part of other ordering practices, one that has exactly the same qualities that other orderings have (Franklin 2004, 280). This approach shifts the analysis of tourism from a thing that exists in a particular, static form (whether glorified or ignored by the state) to a set of overlapping efforts of knowing and governing. Three tasks emerge when taking on tourism as an ordering (following Franklin 2004, 280). First, we must account for the ways tourism itself is the object of ordering, “how modern tourism originated in nation-formation orderings,” and second, we must account for the “formation and working practice” of a tourism ordering. These two tasks have been the focus of this chapter, from the state revival of tourism post-1979 to the changes affecting travel agency business today. State decisions on tourism have had a significant effect in China, and this is reflected in most of the tourism studies literature on China. However, when we consider the broader changes happening in China through the 1990s, as discussed above, the less obvious ordering effects of tourism take on greater significance. The primary
reason for recounting the tourism revival and its relationship to the age of independent tourism in this chapter has been to understand contemporary domestic tourism as both ordered and as ordering.

The third task in approaching tourism as an ordering is to account for the ways that tourism organizes places and people. Because tourism orders more than the workings of an industry and its infrastructure, we should be aware of how ordering effects play off one another, how material place changes influence what tourists desire and do, and how new desires to travel influence the sort of places made available for travel. This is one value of integrating Foucault’s ideas about governance with greater attention to the material world. Franklin summarized this relational materiality of tourism:

Tourism orders both the spaces of tourism, including the sites that are visited and the spaces of mobility that get them there [and] also the tourists themselves. They become self-ordering, self-directed tourists constantly interpellated by, and curious for, the places that have been opened up in their name and which become relevant to them (Franklin 2004).

This task points the way forward in pursuing the ordering effects of independent tourism. On one hand, tourism orders places. The reversal in domestic tourism in China from expert mediation to exploration has reordered the nation’s relationship with place, and changed what may appear as a simple top-down, state-ordering of place. Chapter Three pursues the ordering of place through an account of the production of explorable place, a discussion of placemaking intended to shift the discussion of China’s tourism geography from one of a centrally-administered system of tourism-focused scenic spots, to heterogenous leisure spaces built to encourage commodified forms of exploration.

On the other hand, tourism orders people, not only as the made subjects of governance
(Hacking 2004), but as individuals with ordering effects of their own. China’s new consumer-citizens have sought out – and been encouraged to seek out – a more individualized consumer subjectivity, one that by its nature fit poorly within a tourism industry built to provide standardized experiences. The development of explorable places in China is both an ordering force and an ordering effect of a new generation of Chinese seeking out more diverse experiences. Likewise, independent tourists are not simply a population put into order by a “powerful” state, but rather are a population with their own ordering effects that are important for better understanding contemporary tourism in China. Chapter Four pursues the ordering of people through an account of exploring place, a concept intended to address the dialectical tension in independent tourism as both ordered and ordering.

In addition to these three tasks of approaching tourism as an ordering, I suggest a fourth task, which emerges in Chapter Four, and leads toward the conclusion of this dissertation. This task wraps back onto the question of the relationship between modern tourism and the ordering of nation, specifically in terms of the way that tourism orders knowledge. The self-ordering practices of independent tourists are generative of new collective knowledge about China as a place and nation. Tourists are engaged in a process of knowing China (see Löfgren 2001) in an age different from that of the tourism revival, and a world away from the Mao era. The knowledge generated by independent domestic tourists is not only cognitive, discursive knowledge about places within China’s national boundaries, but is a practical, bodily knowledge based on experiencing the nation. This experience is the basis for a new politics of geographic knowledge production involving a new, exemplary population at once ordered by existing knowledge of the national geo-body and at the same time engaged in reordering that knowledge. What makes this remarkable in the annals of knowledge, nation, and power in China is the fact that unlike the destabilizing politics underlying conflicts over land use, the
suspicion of foreigners’ geographic knowledge of China, or the outright threatening politics of ethnic autonomy or separatism, the primary actor in this new politics is the state’s most exemplary population. And while the state remains deeply invested – to the point of police or military action – in managing knowledge about China’s geo-body, it has at the same time encouraged the travels of more Chinese to more parts of China than ever before, which has opened up the possibility for new geographic knowledge.

Day three. At last, we had the luxury of a late departure, bright in the alpine sun. My travel plans continued to merge with Zhou, Cui, and Chen’s: We caught a ride with the manager of a guesthouse in Yading Village, and stopped at a market for food and a few other last-minute supplies. It was late September, and the poplar trees surrounding Daocheng were starting to turn yellow: They are a now tourist site, an unanticipated outcome of a decade-long afforestation project that began in the late 1980s (SDXB 1997, 36). One final three-hour ride took us from the Daocheng county seat to the Yading Nature Reserve scenic area. We climbed over Bowashan pass, past New Socialist Countryside slogans and a development for resettled nomads. We followed the Chitu River past Gongling Monastery, a hundred years ago the center of religious and political power in the area (and sacked because of it), past tractors, motorcycles, trucks, and a pile of car parts – body panels and pieces from a Toyota Land Cruiser that took a blind turn too fast and drove off the road.

We arrived at the Yading tourist center parking lot, which was full of private cars, some from far-off provinces. In past years it was possible to drive all the way in to Yading Village 23 miles into the nature reserve, but a ban on private vehicles had begun, and all tourists were required to take the sightseeing bus. We unloaded our bags, and bought tickets for the bus in
the tourism center. The prominently-displayed credentials and large scale model of the reserve inside was a sign that the local state was invested in the reserve, though the fact that the lights were off and none of the hundreds of arriving tourists stopped in for a look was a sign that it may not have been important. I sat next to Zhou on the ride into the reserve, and for the first time on the trip it felt like a tour group. Every seat was occupied and cameras and binoculars were out and ready. Zhou told me, unprompted, “In recent years, people want to go to undeveloped places. The differences between China’s cities aren’t very big – every city has a pedestrian zone (buxingjie, 步行街), like Chunxi Lu in Chengdu, and they all have an ancient quarter (guxiang qu, 古乡区), like Kuan Zhai Xiangzi. And domestic travel tours are terrible: they visit four or five shopping centers in a day, and they’re tightly run and expensive. This is enough reason to avoid a tour group.”

Up the road at the reserve gate, an employee got on the bus to check our tickets, slowly working down the aisle. Someone on the bus yelled, “Hurry up!” A woman clutching binoculars joined in, yelling “We came here to see the scenery, not watch you collect your fees!” Once through the gate, our driver sped right past all the viewing platforms along the road to Yading Village, including the usual stop at the first dramatic view into the main valley. No one seemed to notice until we passed the sign for Yading Village, when the same woman asked the driver, “Are we here already? Why didn’t you stop at any viewing platforms?”

I read the instructions printed on the back of my ticket. They told me to obey service staff, stay on designated paths, prevent fires, and respect the natural environment. The advice of Deng’s doctor on Huangshan resonates with rule number four:

The scenic area elevation is higher, the diurnal temperature difference is big, the sunshine is strong, please use judgment to control the physiological load of exercise, prepare for anti-plateau reflection, guard against the cold, and guard against exposure to the sun...
We shouldn’t stay too long.

The bus’s air horn shrieked as we made the final few turns into Yading Village. We got off at the village center, where other tourists boarded for the rest of the ride to the trailhead. We got settled at the guesthouse and made plans for an afternoon visit to Drolma Lake. It was 55 hours since our journey began at gate C16 in Chengdu, and we finally caught sight of our goal: Visible directly up the valley was Chanadordje, and behind a close ridge was Shenrezig, both summits bright in the midday sun.
The production of explorable place

A thirty-foot tall stack of multilingual road signs (Figure 7) stands along National Road 318 as it enters downtown Kangding, exactly across the street from the airport bus terminus. Unlike the blue traffic signs standard across China, these signs are brown and provide directions and driving distances to seventeen local tourist sights. For much of the twentieth century, Kangding was one of the most important trading centers along the route between Sichuan and Tibet, though by the beginning of the twenty-first it had become the gateway to a new national leisure landscape, with much of eastern Tibet open to China’s urban tourists in search of adventure.

Signs like these do not speak to the professional drivers of transport trucks or military convoys that pass through the area, but rather to drivers unfamiliar with the territory who have come for sites of cultural and natural interest. They address a nation of independent travelers, many of whom travel through Kangding on “self-driving” (zijiache, 自驾车) trips without the help of tour guides or professional drivers. These signs mark a new explorable territory, and this one in particular marked the beginning of a 12-hour bus ride with Zhou Liang and his friends across western Sichuan. From Kangding, a new tourism landscape unfolds, with Yading, one of Sichuan’s new tourism priorities, at one extreme. As remote as it is from major urban
areas, the development of Yading as a tourism destination is related to projects that are remaking places for urban leisure and tourism all across China.

![Figure 7: Choices along the western Sichuan tourism loop. Road sign, Kangding. (Author photo.)](image)

In a guesthouse during one of my research trips, I found among piles of maps, books, and other tourism information a glossy, full-color brochure published by the Ganzi Tourism Bureau in 2003.24 Similar in tone to the “Brief Introduction” sign at the Yading trailhead, the brochure presented the prefecture as the “Number one cultural and ecological tourism destination among all Chinese prefectures.” The brochure touted the official geography:

---

24 The brochure lacked official publishing information, though it matched the form and much of the content of a second brochure published in 2009 by the Ganzi Tourism Bureau.
Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is located on the southeastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau, in the Western part of Sichuan Province. It has 18 counties covering an area of 153,000 square kilometers with a population of 890,000. The capital is Kangding.

Ganzi Prefecture is the centre of the Kham region – one of the three branches of Tibetan culture. It is also the centre of the Shangri-La ecological travel region, which includes parts of Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet. As Wei Xiao’an\textsuperscript{25} says: “In this place the very best of natural sights and regional cultures of China are collected. It is a world class travel destination.”

Ganzi is the centre of tea trade, the hometown of the famous Kangding Love song, and of Tibetan cultural hero King Gesar. It is a gallery of local cultures and history. As Fei Xiaotong\textsuperscript{26} says: “This gallery is located between the Tibetan and Yi cultures. There are many exciting historical artifacts. The area should be considered a precious preserve of history and linguistics.”

Ganzi Prefecture is the closest Tibetan area to Chengdu, and the easiest travel to. It is just 4 hours from Chengdu to Hailuogou, and from there only another few hours to Kangding.

In Chinese, the brochure referred repeatedly to multiple tourism regions (l"uyou qu, 旅游区) and landscapes (jingguan, 景观) within the prefecture. It was organized around three tourism routes in Ganzi: the Western Sichuan Tourism Loop (from Chengdu through Kangding and continuing north through Danba and the Four Sisters mountain range), the Pursuit of King Gesar Tourism Route to the northwest,\textsuperscript{27} and the Shangrila Premier Route to the south, which

\textsuperscript{25}Wei Xiao’an (1952–) is a leading scholar of tourism economics and management, and co-editor of the China Academy of Social Science’s annual Green Book of China’s Tourism.

\textsuperscript{26}Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005) was an important anthropologist in China whose work on ethnicity was influential during much of the 20th century.

\textsuperscript{27}King Gesar is a Tibetan folk hero and warrior king from an eponymous epic poem.
highlights the Yading Nature Reserve. The brochure presented Ganzi as the perfect place for “exploring Kham culture in depth” and for experiencing untrammeled natural beauty and Tibetan culture: “Ganzi is a pure and fertile place, a place [that has] not been polluted by industry and civilization, a place which is still like our dreams.” And this place was just a few hours drive from Chengdu, one of China’s most important cities. The map of the Western Sichuan Tourism Loop (Figure 8) includes most of the sites appearing on the road sign, a driving loop full of newly popular tourism sites.

The year this brochure was published – 2003 – was terrible for tourism in China. The SARS crisis hit in the spring and would cause the biggest decline in tourism revenue since the Tiananmen uprising in 1989. Sichuan Province, where tourism revenue can comprise 12 percent of provincial GDP, responded by holding its first annual tourism development congress in late August,\(^\text{28}\) which included a keynote address by the provincial party secretary, Zhang Xuezhong. Zhang said, “We must quicken the opening of a western tourism loop, extending China’s Shangrila Ecotourism Region to include Daocheng Yading, which will become one of Sichuan’s tourism bright spots (liang dian, 点).” He added, “In the north, there is Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong, in the middle there is the Giant Panda, and in the south there is Daocheng Yading” (SDXB 2009, 271). The Ganzi Prefecture tourism brochure I found was published that same year, and the itineraries it echoed the top provincial official’s vision.

Like the road sign in Kangding, the Ganzi Prefecture tourism brochure indicates that the state’s understanding of what makes a tourist experience has changed. A special section of travel information filled the last page, a mix of geographic facts that included a calendar of

---

Figure 8: The “Western Sichuan Tourism Loop,” Ganzi Prefecture (Kangding at center of lower third).
Tibetan festivals, driving distances from Chengdu and Kangding, and facts about Ganzi’s physical geography: elevation, peak wind speed, the number of frost-free days, and average rainfall. The section provided practical travel advice for visitors unaccustomed to the high elevation of the Tibetan area:

Ganzi Prefecture has [a] plateau climate. ...You’d better [take] some medicine such as vitamins and medicine for resistance to lack of oxygen.

The ultraviolet light here is strong. You’d better put on your cap and glasses for outdoor activities.

Ganzi Prefecture is multi-ethnic, with Tibetans dominating. You must respect the local people and their customs.

Even as the prefectoral and the provincial governments were building new places for tourism, they were confronting the fact that increasing numbers of Chinese tourists needed new kinds of knowledge to travel in this “world class travel destination.”

What is happening across Ganzi prefecture is part of a larger-scale intensification of the desire for and development of “place” in China. A transformation of urban landscapes and a shift in governing strategies has taken place over the past two decades (Wu 1998), and new spaces have been produced that encourage the practices that drive a new service sector economy. During this period, as primary development actors have shifted from the central state to local governments and private enterprises, the mode of urban development has shifted from a central plan to increasingly flexible, entrepreneurial forms of capital investment. This change calls to mind the shift in urban planning seen decades earlier in the United States, where,
“vernacular traditions, local history, and specialized spatial designs…[were] approached with a much greater eclecticism of style” (Harvey 1987, 262), even though the role of the state in making leisure and tourism spaces remains dominant.

China’s transition from a command economy to a hybrid socialist-neoliberal economy (Sigley 2006; He and Wu 2009) has enabled – and been enabled by – new spatial productions. The local state has turned to new placemaking strategies to generate growth that have spanned the development of residential housing, business and industrial parks, retail environments, and leisure space. The transformation of place in China has since the early 1990s shifted from spaces that reflect a central state vision for what the nation needs to more diverse, market-oriented “places” that encourage desirable consumer behaviors, and that are in themselves desirable as sites of leisure.

My approach in this chapter – as the title reflects – echoes Henri Lefebvre’s analysis of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991), and I adapt his high-level discussion of space to a more specific discussion of place production in Sichuan Province. While often thought of and presented as different terms signifying conceptually different approaches (spaces of capital of accumulation, or meaningful home places, for example) (see Duncan 2000) my approach to the terms space and place is fairly flexible, even agnostic. While I agree that the distinctions between the terms are real and useful (see Wainwright and Barnes 2009), they can flip back and forth between one another like a Necker cube. We can see this in terms of space in the work of Lefebvre: Perhaps due to the influence of David Harvey, the “production of space” tends to be read as a matter of the dominance of the spatial order of late capitalism over place, though a reading of Lefebvre’s work more sensitive to his dialectical interest in “lived space” reveals the importance of everyday life and the role of the body, both of which are suggestive of place. At the same time, place in a humanistic sense (see Tuan 1980) can also be put in service of a
dominant spatial order, as we see in the ways that development projects aimed at (re)creating places for capital accumulation through leisure and tourism. I’ve chosen to focus on place not because it indicates something different than space, but rather because of the ways that it slips so easily between describing an abstracted production of “place” and describing the “platial” practices that engage that space. Place slips conceptually between a political economic production and a fundamental human phenomenology (see Cresswell 2004), a fact that I find useful in drawing out the paradoxes of place (see Oakes 1997) in contemporary China. In terms of domestic tourism in contemporary China, this is a story about how the state and the population (individually and collectively) have together become more engaged in matters of place.

This chapter focuses on place in terms of placemaking, that is, of place production as a mode of ordering (Law 1994, 18–28) places to fit within China’s socialist-neoliberal political rationality. Urban placemaking has long been an important part of nation-making projects in China, beginning with Soviet influences in architecture and urban planning in the 1950s, and with urban planning as a technique of governance in the 1990s (Bray 2005, 4, 72). Placemaking projects that commodify cultural heritage in the form of historical “preservation” projects have in many cases been possible only because of the transformation of the urban landscape (Zhang 2008). But from what can be seen even along the roads of remote areas, placemaking has also become a project that territorializes urban models for place in China’s rural and remote areas. A new network of rural- and nature-themed tourist sites has been established in the countryside, from ‘happy farmer’ homes to ancient towns, and new nature reserves have been established in remote locations. These new rural places complement urban sites as part of a heterogenous array of places and landscapes available for self-organized tourism.

The rise of independent tourism in China is an integral part of a broader set of spatial
changes transforming China. As independent tourism between the city and the countryside has become a national routine, it has helped catalyze the transformation of place. Rather than being taken as a socially and politically peripheral activity, independent tourism – in urban as well as in rural and remote areas – should be taken as an important spatial change in itself. This chapter argues that independent tourism is an important part of a new national placemaking project that has transformed tourism places in contemporary China from serving primarily as standardized, centrally-administered package tourism sites to increasingly serving the heterogenous desires of an individualizing nation seeking opportunities for discovery and exploration. I call the strategies behind this placemaking project the production of explorable place.

Explorable place is not intended to describe a new kind or type of place in China, but is rather a way of conceptualizing placemaking strategies being employed across China, and thinking through the role that concrete tourism practices have in China’s place-based urban economy (Wu 2007). A conceptual distinction is necessary here, between types of tourist sites built to represent and display culture for tourists (and calling for expert interpretation) to a process of planning and ordering tourist sites intended to accommodate self-organized experiences, whether exclusively or complementary to package tourism. The deliberate, planned construction of “place” implicit in the term placemaking is the effect of planning and calculation – a spatial production.

My use of the term placemaking draws on two perspectives. The first concerns placemaking as a cultural-aesthetic strategy of urbanization (Harvey 1987, 263), a strategy that makes culture the “business of the city” (Zukin 1995, 2). Placemaking understood along these lines employs cultural and natural “heritage” (Wright 2009; Lowenthal 1995) as expedients to problems of urban development and economic growth (Youlouse 2003). This perspective
developed as a critique of urbanism in the United States beginning in the early 1970s, as
government authority and subsidies attracted private investment in transforming urban space
into engines for economic growth (Zhang and Fang 2004, 294). The changes happening in
China today have been cause to consider whether an American precedent is being repeated in
China, with a similar disenfranchisement of local communities but at an even faster pace (ibid.,
294–95).

The second perspective of placemaking I draw on concerns the ways that places can be
made more habitable. This idea has a history in various forms, perhaps most well known after
the work of Jane Jacobs (2002), who was concerned with how cities can be built to be better
places for their residents. Harvey (1987) was skeptical of this approach, though this is related to
his overarching concern with the political economy. Harvey’s skepticism about placemaking
aside, we can see in such approaches elements of Lefebvre’s (1991, 39) concern for the
relationship between between how spaces are produced and how these spaces are directly lived
and inhabited. Harvey and Lefebvre are each critical of the dominance of place production,
though Lefebvre left open the possibility for place transformation through the rhythms of
everyday practice (see 1996). Lefebvre was more fully aware of the tension in placemaking
between place as a commodity built for a political economic purpose (see Harvey 1987) and
place as a human dwelling, even in the face of its commodification (Ingold 2000, 329; Ingold
2005). I’ll set aside the argument whether a place produced can accommodate dwelling and
focus on the more concrete tensions between how place is produced and how it is lived out.
This chapter focuses on how the practice of placemaking in China has changed, and how
producing places that encourage tourism has become a higher priority. Chapter Four will pick
up the other element in this tension, which runs through the following discussion: The
production of explorable places requires the presence of exploring bodies, of consuming tourist-explorers with new desires for and new demands on place.

*Spatial change in post-reform China*

The ordering of western Sichuan as a new leisure landscape is not a process unique to the area, but reflects place ordering strategies at work across urban China, including in the provincial capital Chengdu. I’m going to discuss two placemaking cases that help bridge the urban/rural question, taking steps from the inner city to periurban areas and finally to the remote location of Yading. The first is a paragon of both high socialist planning and of late capitalist placemaking. The second is an example of the ways that urban placemaking strategies can be transposed on rural spaces.

In 1956 the Hongguang Cathode Ray Tube Factory\(^{29}\) was built in the rice and rapeseed fields that spread to the northeast of Chengdu. The site was one of the 156 industrial projects China developed with Soviet help in the 1950s. As new rail spurs branched into farmland, the area became a center for electronics and machine manufacturing. By 1970, Hongguang had become a state secret, as it began producing specialized parts for military oscilloscopes and radar, especially black-and-white cathode ray tubes shaped like a chalice with a square, screen-like bowl. With the national strategy to integrate military and civilian production that began with the economic reforms of 1979, factories like Hongguang shifted production to consumer goods. In the 1980s Hongguang flourished as it manufactured consumer televisions and washing machines, new appliances at the center of lifestyle changes that seemed to

---

\(^{29}\)Hongguang was also known as the 773 Factory. The factory history recounted here is drawn from: Chengdu chuan-mei wenhua chanye yuanqu yingying guanli youxian gongsi [Chengdu Media Culture Industry Park Operations Management Ltd.]. Meng gongchang, meng gongyuan [Dream Factory, Dream Park]. Public relations material.
announce the arrival of modernity in China. Hongguang survived the reforms of state-owned enterprises in the late 1990s, but by then the industrial outskirts of Chengdu were filling in with residential and commercial developments, and were being targeted by new urban development plans. Today, after two decades of economic growth, Chengdu’s industrial eastern districts are home to some of the city’s prime real estate, and like much of Chengdu’s urban fringe, the area has been transformed on a massive scale.

In 2001 the Chengdu municipal government implemented a plan to remake its eastern district into a modern New City; it would renovate, move, or simply demolish the industrial complexes that had come to define that part of the city. In 2009, echoing similar policy announcements at the central and other municipal governments, the city issued a creative industries development plan that called for increased growth in economic value added by Chengdu’s creative industries, with six construction targets, including building new creative design bases for the creation of digital content and distribution.30 The Chengdu Media Group (Chengdu chuanmei jitian, 成都传媒集团) – owner of ten major Chengdu newspapers and magazines, a publishing company, the city subway television system, and a web publishing platform – was specifically named in this plan as the primary actor for implementing these objectives, as well as for building a “digital music production park” that would “increase the market share of wireless telecommunications.”

With Chengdu’s municipal push to develop creative industries,31 the Chengdu Media Group, with planning help from a professor from Peking University’s Institute for Cultural Industries and in cooperation with the Sichuan branch of China Mobile, announced a project to

---


31 The national push to develop creative industries began with the Twelfth Five-Year-Plan.
develop the East Chengdu Music Park.\textsuperscript{32} The Chengdu Media Group reportedly invested over US$870m in the project, including the US$170m purchase of land use rights for the factory grounds once held by a central government department overseeing industrial production of electronics.\textsuperscript{33} In 2011, the transformation of Hongguang’s old factory grounds into the East Chengdu Music Park was complete. The Chengdu Media Group was not only the main investor and developer, but it owned the construction company who built the park and many of the newspapers that reported the park’s opening. While private enterprises have become involved in commercial and residential development across China, and on a small scale have been involved in the production of tourism and leisure spaces, flagship projects like this one are case studies in the ways that placemaking has been taken up as a core practice of municipal governance. A placemaking project had transformed the factory from being a holdover of socialist industrialism to a symbol of the cultural and creative industries that the state sees as engines for future economic growth. Like many industrial heritage projects around the world (see Jonsen-Verbeke 1999), the factory had become the product.

When I visited the East Chengdu Music Park in its opening month, the hum on the grounds of the former factory was from visitors at play, walking, photographing, eating, drinking, and clubbing. Hongguang’s factory buildings had been converted into art galleries, bars, restaurants, performance spaces, and retail stores. The grounds were illuminated with colored lights that turned dark corners of the complex into inviting, photogenic side paths (Figure 9). There were places to sit, an outdoor music stage, and tasteful interpretive signage


\textsuperscript{33}See previous footnote. See also: Chengdu dongqu yinyue gongyuan xiangmu touzi fenxi bao-gao [Report on East Chengdu Music Park project investment analysis]. http://doc.mbalib.com/view/6597b8701036c311e1910e0d1b8ciaac.html (accessed 8 August 2014).
that explained the history of each building. The tallest smokestack marked the unlikely location of a beer garden, where visitors could drink a wheat beer under Bavarian colors outside what was once the factory’s most secret workshop. A Chengdu secret once hidden behind guarded walls, was now an open, walkable place. With no entry ticket to buy, it was possible to wander in and out of the development as if passing through any other city neighborhood. In its opening month the park hosted the city’s largest music festival, an open-air affair on a newly constructed stage set against rusting water tanks. It hosted Chengdu’s fifth annual art biennial, underwhelming as an art event but the first of its kind within the old factory walls. And each day, strolling local residents and cross-town visitors made the old industrial access roads feel like a small town promenade with grandparents, toddlers, prams, and poodles.

While the East Chengdu Music Park immediately caught the interest of Chengdu residents, it failed to attract the dynamic creative industry investment it was intended to. The China Culture Daily, published by China’s Ministry of Culture, called the operation an embarrassment: In its opening weeks, the report said, the park saw a constant stream of visitors – 1.2 million altogether – but many saw it simply as a commercial leisure project rather than a center for the music industry it was intended to be. The park had failed to attract the business and talent that the city thought would drive a creative economy.  

34 The East Chengdu Music Park existed only for a year before its music focus was deemed too narrow, and it was rebranded the Eastern Suburb Memory in 2012, 35 an ungainly name in English, but one that indicates a softening of the future-focused creative industry discourse and an intensification of urban, industrial, and

---


Figure 9: East Chengdu Music Park, architectural rendering. (Promotional material, c.2011).
Communist heritage. The site’s marketing materials made a shift as well: The promotional package I received when the park first opened was designed to look like a vinyl LP, complete with an antiqued inner sleeve covering a round, black music-themed brochure. The cover read:

[The] East Chengdu Music park perfectly combines mainstream music and non-mainstream music, sketching the width and depth of music consuming culture. The cross-border integration of different kinds of music dreams...make you enjoy the unlimited charm of music in all perceptions...

Following the rebranding of the park, the site’s website was scrubbed of the grand music-related messaging, and a new narrative positioned the factory as a place that looked back on a period of Chengdu history now gone. The park was now Eastern Suburb Memory: a microcosm of Chengdu’s old industrial bases, a historical memory inscribed [mingke, 铭刻] on the hearts of Chengdu residents, and a new type of modern culture industry park [xinxing yuanqu,新型园区] inheriting the development of Chengdu’s industrial civilization.36

When I first visited the park, it was full of Chengdu residents. I made a brief informal survey of visitors at a busy outdoor seating area during the National Holiday, and of the 23 people I spoke with, all were from Chengdu – 18 had walked to the park from their home. A public relations representative in the development office later confirmed that most people visiting were locals. Ordinary Chengdu life came alive in Eastern Suburb Memory, though while the developers frame the factory as an important part of Chengdu’s collective memory, they have bragged about attracting tourists: The park claims that in its opening two years it had

---

received over 13 million tourist visits, and it was recognized by the CNTA as an official National AAAA Scenic Spot in 2013. The scenic spot, in this case was an afterthought to a forward-thinking placemaking project concerned with things other than tourism.

If the Hongguang Cathode Ray Tube Factory of the 1950s was exemplary of the collective and egalitarian function of industrial urban space in Mao-era China, the Eastern Suburb Memory is exemplary of the central role that place-based tourism and cultural consumption have come to have in contemporary China, as well as the ongoing role that the state has in creating places for leisure and tourism. The presentation of Eastern Suburb Memory as a new type of culture industry park, and the fact that tourism and everyday life both find a home here indicates the closer relationship of new strategies of place production and tourism. As new as sites like Eastern Suburb Memory may be to China, there is a sense that we’ve seen this kind of thing before, this sense of a visitor being “plunged into a totally constructed space” (Boyer 1996, 423). This case illustrates the transformation of landscape of labor and industrialization into a spectacle (Debord 1992), a serialized monotony (Harvey 1989), a static tableau of heritage (Boyer 1996) that serves to attract capital and tourists in a period, like that of the 1970s in the United States, of “intensified inter-urban competition and urban entrepreneurialism” (Harvey 1989, 91–92). The critique leveled against such spaces in the US is relevant here, as the distillation of geography and history into an impressive visual display obliterates context, both of the present and of the history being employed in the production of the place (Boyer 1996, 423–24). Boyer’s critique is strongest concerning the spatial differentiation that these historic preservation projects create, the ways they privilege certain spaces, people, and histories by featuring the

---

37 Ibid.

desirable parts, and marginalizing others by effacing the “mire of decay and neglect” (Boyer 1996, 450, 475). This aspect of the critique is applicable to China, and we can see why projects such as Eastern Suburb Memory are so attractive to the state, which reaps the dual benefits of economic growth through development and a social ordering that presents the contemporary Chinese city in its best (that is, heavily edited) form. The production of explorable place can be thought through along similar lines, as a fundamental part of how the state attempts to put the nation’s places into a desired order.

Over the past hundred years, each state movement in China – including the current Communist Party’s – worked to define the nation it sought to govern (Fitzgerald 1995; Leibold 2007). The population encountered by each state movement was not a preexisting national body, and it did not match the nation envisioned by those who sought to establish a new, sovereign state (Fitzgerald 1995, 76). One of the many state nation-making projects employed to create a national subject that fit the state imagination was the ordering of social space. This is particularly evident in the PRC’s goal of forming a more productive and egalitarian society through the scientific – and spatial – ordering of society (Bray 2005, 76). The nation defined by the Communist Party in the early twentieth century was a class-nation comprised by the working class, the peasantry, and some elements of the bourgeoisie (Fitzgerald 1995, 98). And after coming to national power in 1949, the Communist Party set to work producing new forms of space suited to its national vision, a case that confirms Lefebvre’s observation that

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly
revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space... (1991, 54)

For Mao, the spatial form of the revolution meant that, “only when production in the cities is restored and developed, when consumer-cities are transformed into producer-cities, can the people’s political power be consolidated” (Ma 1979, 840). Designing and building the material form of an ideological nation became a priority for the CCP, which began demonstrating its new authority by building a new socialist-industrial city on a Soviet model (Xie and Costa 1991), with large central squares, wide street grids, and imposing government buildings. However, as Bray has argued, China’s projection of state power through monumental projects was never its most effective ideological tool. More important in ordering the new social life of the nation was the lived space of the danwei (单位), the work units that were the central organizing principle for urban social life, integrating schools, housing, hospitals, government offices, and factories within a single spatial unit (Bray 2005, 124). The danwei was, “designed to represent the centrality of collective labor and egalitarian social relationships” (ibid., 125).

We can see the danwei system as a strategic placemaking project, one that closely tied the economic and ideological priorities of the Communist Party of the Mao era to the real-world development of working and living spaces. But as powerful as the bounded, self-contained danwei model was for urban China in the Mao era command economy, economic reforms beginning in 1979 would inevitably lead to a shift in the spatial strategies employed in ordering Chinese society. The change has been gradual but undeniable, as the danwei system has given way to new modes of social ordering, for example with the “community” (shequ, 社区) becoming a new basic unit of urban governance. Reform era changes have also transformed China’s cities into a patchwork landscape of heterogenous land use: business districts,
gentrified residential communities, social areas, urban sprawl, peripheral residential communities, and development zones (Wu 1998).

With the reform era turn to a market economy driven by service-sector growth, placemaking in China has become even more important. It has shifted in purpose from the nation-defining practice of a new socialist state to a nation-sustaining project that brings to mind the kind of urban changes seen in liberal democracies. Its importance has shifted from being a primary tool of the state, to a strategy that depends on the participation of private businesses and consumers. This shift is at the heart of the spatial transformation of the former Hongguang factory from a symbol of the producer-city Mao idealized to a symbol of the consumer-city he despised.

The property-led redevelopment of urban areas has been a key driver of urban change (He and Wu 2005), and land has been the primary resource mobilized in new placemaking projects like Eastern Suburb Memory. Land in China remains the property of the central state, and until the late 1980s, the central state exercised exclusive rights over both land ownership and land-use (Hsing 2010, 5). The danwei system illustrates how central state authority was expressed in a national placemaking project. In the first decade of the reform era, placemaking strategies changed gradually, though 1988 can be seen as a turning point in placemaking in China, from a time when central authority was more important and the domestic population was largely excluded from the emerging tourism economy, to a boom time in placemaking when municipal governments had more authority over how local land was used and the domestic market became the top priority.

The essential change that began this era of intensified placemaking was the commodification of land following revisions made to China’s Land Management Law in 1988. These revisions recognized municipal governments as the exclusive representative of the central
state in overseeing land transfers and leasing (Hsing 2010, 39) – in short, the local state was authorized to accept payment for the transfer of land use rights (Xu, Yeh and Wu 2009, 891). While the central state retained ownership of land, the authority to decide how that land was used was delegated to local governments. In 1989, with the City Planning Act, municipal governments were given more specific authority to develop their own urban plans, issue land use permits, and control local development (He and Wu 2009, 286; Oi 1995, 1132). And in 1990, the central state approved additional regulations on the granting and transfer of land use rights. An important paper assessing these changes sees them as, “an integral part of the mechanisms changing post-reform urban conditions. The establishment of land markets leads to commodification of the built environment, which opens up a new site for capital accumulation” (Xu, Yeh and Wu 2009, 892). In other words, these changes were fundamental to opening China up to forces of spatial transformation under capitalism that have been critiqued by many scholars since the 1970s (Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 1987). The authors go on to identify two effects of these changes that are critical in understanding the changes in placemaking strategies over the past two decades:

Two major trends in state reorganization are also distinguishable... Denationalization occurs due to the strategic significance of economic decentralization that rearticulates state functions downwards to the local state, leading to a broad extension of the latter’s discretion in developing urban land. Destatization involves a shift from central state dominance towards various non-state actors and levels of partnership in land development.

(Xu, Yeh and Wu 2009, 8992)

The possibilities for intensified placemaking were boosted by decentralizing placemaking authority to the local state and by broadening the impetus for placemaking to include non-state
actors (and non-state funds). The central state has not stepped back from ordering social space in China, but has rescaled its power, transforming a hierarchical, centralized dominance over administrative units into a interregional “territorial governance” across and between those units (Li and Wu 2012; Xu 2008). This economic decentralization has, in fact, served as an effective governing strategy in that it incentivizes local governments to promote local economic growth, often with culture being employed to generate development opportunities (Wu and Zhang 2008, 150, 152). While the central state retains control over some aspects of local state power – such as monetary policy, restrictions on showcase projects, and regulation of foreign investment (Xu and Yeh 2009) – placemaking is one aspect where there has not been a retrenchment of central state authority, and where we see the opposite effect, the rise of the Chinese entrepreneurial city (Wu and Yeh 2007, 306).

The local state – that is, municipal governments and counterpart state “land masters” who also have land-use transfer rights (Hsing 2010) – has developed the ability to transform land into cultural capital through placemaking projects. With the mutually-reinforcing forces of placemaking and new consumer desire for place, we can begin to speak of China not only as a nation of “old” places – the native places and historical landscapes of “traditional” China – but also as a nation of “new” places, a new national geography built as counterpart to the shift to a service-sector economy and the production of a new population of exemplary consumer-citizens (Klingberg and Oakes 2012).

The process of urban planning itself has become a placemaking process (Wu 2000, 1367). The standardization and institutionalization of producing “place” is a new and primary strategy of local state governance shared nationally. Like much of what happens in terms of tourism development, the intensification of place and placemaking is not an explicit policy at the national level. Decisions by the central government tend to be strategic in nature, leaving
implementation to local governments. As Hsing has demonstrated in terms of urbanization, placemaking in China also includes a range of actors, sometimes those driving urban development, other times institutions specifically created and tasked to develop places for tourism.

The establishment of danwei space was a crucial factor in ordering a socialist Chinese society beginning in the 1950s. The establishment of a consumer- and service-sector-oriented urban environment has been a crucial factor in ordering a hybrid socialist-neoliberal urbanism beginning in the 1990s. The empowerment of the local state to transfer land-use rights and to develop local strategic plans – along with other central state policy changes – led to a boom time in the transformation of urban space: Where in the 1980s urban social life was largely ordered through welfare housing allocation, the absence of a land market, and a strict residential registration system, by the 2000s, commodity housing, land leasing, and relaxed registration policies were a major part of an emerging heterogeneity of urban space where placemaking projects encouraged diverse social relationships and distinctive lifestyles (He and Wu 2009; Wu 2009, 425). In 1998, a new housing monetarization policy privatized urban housing (Davis 2003; Pow 2009), leading to the rise in residential real estate and gated communities (Huang 2006; Pow 2007; Xu and Yang 2009; Wu 2010; Zhang 2010).

Before the 1980s, retail stores were limited to one of seven state-designated types (one of which was the coal store) (Wang and Guo 2007, 265). But with the deregulation and privatization of the retail industry that began in 1984 and with the greater availability of retail capital, particularly after the industry was completely opened to foreign investment in 2004, “consumption spaces” in urban China today have become as pervasive as they are diverse (Wang and Guo 2007, 265). As the state-dominated retail distribution system transformed into a global market-oriented industry, China’s retail landscape changed dramatically, from the 1990s
boom in department stores, to the hypermarkets of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and to shopping malls and open-air commercial districts in the 2000s (Wang and Guo 2007, 265). In 2005, there were already over 3000 shopping-oriented central pedestrian districts in China, according to an industry group (Yang and Xu 2009, 84). Local governments have in some cases required new developments to be more open to pedestrian traffic, and allow for more diverse public use (Yang and Xu 2009, 92–94).

The spatial changes that have come in the wake of the land reforms of the late 1980s mark the rise of a new urbanism in China, one that is much less concerned with homogenous social behaviors of a working class, and much more concerned with the anonymous, heterogenous social relations that drive a market economy whose growth depends on the service sector (Wu 2009). Throughout this same period we can track the rise of individualism in China (Yan 2010), as well as the transition in domestic tourism from package tourism to independent tourism (see Chapter Two). Independent forms of tourism became popular just as local governments had more cash on hand to invest in tourist sites and leisure spaces. And because places no longer needed to serve the political pedagogy of the central state, they turned to meeting the diversifying demands of a leisure-consuming public. The trajectory set in the late 1980s for the production of new tourism places was not an arc that followed the centrally-managed package tourism model of the 1980s, but rather one that followed the new order that rose in the 1990s.

*Making places for tourism*

State attention to tourism placemaking in the early reform era was directed toward the improvement of sites that would display China’s history and culture to foreigners. Deng Xiaoping’s tourism talks in 1979 expressed the need to restore China’s tourism sites, not only eastern sites like Huangshan or the Great Wall, but Emei Mountain in Sichuan, the Dunhuang
Caves in Gansu, and the Stone Forest in Yunnan, all sites in western China that became well known to foreigners in the reform era (Xiao 2006). At the time, the state was uninterested in developing domestic tourism, and it was far less engaged in tourism placemaking projects for the population at home. Instead, the state was heavily invested in the provision of other leisure services for the population, from cinemas to cultural centers (wenhuagong, 文化宫), libraries to zoos, sports stadiums and parks (Xiao 2003, 267–268). This changed over time, as the private sector became increasingly involved in leisure and tourism development, such as state-designated tourism resorts, commercial sports facilities, recreation and entertainment facilities, and theme parks (ibid., 286–271). Of these, the theme park would come to have the greatest significance for tourism in China, both as a model for tourism site development for the domestic market and as a marker of China’s new globally-oriented economic age.

Splendid China, the country’s first modern theme park opened in Shenzhen in 1989, funded primarily by overseas investment (Oakes 1998, 51). Two years later, the Folk Culture Villages theme park opened nearby, and in the decade that followed many hundreds of similar parks would be built nationwide (Ap 2003, 195). The “theme park fever” that followed the opening of Splendid China provided urban and rural governments alike with a model for tourism placemaking that commodified Chinese culture and history in a way that served both the state’s ideological and economic goals (see Oakes 1998, 50–57, 135; Anagnost 1993). The importance of these sites in calibrating Chinese desires for leisure experiences is evident in the fact that they served as the iconic backdrop to Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour in 1992. Despite the importance of this tour for speeding economic development, at the time the most widely reported aspect of his Shenzhen stop was Deng’s visit to these two theme parks. One image shows Deng posing with his family in front of the replica Potala Palace in the Folk Culture Villages (Figure 10), a photograph not unlike the commemorative tour group photos still made
at tourist sites across China. The photograph is also different from the popular image of the “founder” of China’s tourism industry on his climb of Huangshan over a decade earlier.

![Image of Deng Xiaoping and family at Splendid China, Shenzhen, January 1992.](image)

While many of the top tourism sites of the 1980s remain some of China’s greatest attractions, theme parks like Splendid China feel anachronistic in an age when China’s global presence and Chinese cosmopolitanism lie not in a potential future but are here now. While much of the scholarship on theme parks has focused on their success, there is reason to question how effective these parks and their ideological purpose have been over the longer term. One report (Ap 2003) argued that theme park attendance in the early 1990s was so bad that they faced a crisis of failure. The list of problems identified in national trends of theme park construction is an object lesson of the inherent problems of a standardized, homogenized approach to placemaking:

- inappropriate location
- repetition and copying of parks
- inadequate feasibility studies
- ineffective evaluation of projects
• lack of market knowledge and research
• poor design planning
• lack of effective control
• low-quality development
• lack of interactivity and dynamism

One of the few attempts at understanding the production of tourism places as a national project is Nyíri’s analysis of scenic spots (lüyou jingdian/qu, 旅游景点/区). Nyíri (2005, x–xi, 48–57) defines scenic spots as bounded, controlled, homogenous tourist zones that are delimited, developed, classified, and standardized by the state, and his goal was to explain what makes modern Chinese tourist sites. His answer was that state makes a tourist site, and embeds in them its cultural authority. Nyíri’s main political argument is that

scenic spots and their state-endorsed hierarchy are tools of patriotic education and modernization, and in which the state has the ultimate authority to determine the meaning of the landscape.... One reason for [the sensory and narrative uniformity of tourist sites] is the strong and continued involvement of the highly centralized Chinese state in defining tourism itineraries (75, 69).

This apparent homogeneity – of tourist desires (see discussion in Chapter Two) and of tourist spaces – is both the result and perpetuation of state didacticism, of representing and interpreting Chinese culture for the purposes of patriotic education (ibid., 96).

In conceptualizing scenic spots this way, Nyíri combined the spatial form of the theme park (the bounded, controlled packaging of culture) with the argument that Chinese attitudes toward China’s landscapes are preconditioned by a cultural legacy that seeks validation through the poetic, rather than practical, knowledge of place (Petersen 1995, 150). Theme parks, as early
tourism placemaking projects, emphasized a shared Chinese cultural identity over an individualized touristic experience, and “to the extent that the Folk Culture Villages serves the ideologically-determined objectives of the Chinese state, the theme park may be said to be propagandist” (Sofield and Li 1998, 385). According to Nyíri, the state, through the development of scenic spots, capitalized on the fact that Chinese shared a knowledge of their nation’s cultural landscapes, which have been interpreted as vehicles “for carrying Chinese philosophies and thoughts” (Petersen 1995, 143). However, while Nyíri cites the report mentioned above in his discussion of the relationship between theme parks and scenic spots (2005, 15), he does not mention the negative assessment of the theme park model nationally. Instead, he sees a fundamental similarity in the experience of visiting a theme park with visiting a scenic spot, that is, in the apparent fulfillment of a Chinese desire for confirmation of the “common knowledge” about China’s landscape and being Chinese, and for a pilgrimage through one’s own (Han) cultural heritage (Petersen 1995, 143; Sofield and Li 1998, 367). For Nyíri, sociologically speaking, China’s scenic spots offer little more than the same old theme park experience (2005, 17, 50, 71).

We can see in the early stages of the reform era, in the development of theme parks and scenic spots, examples of placemaking projects that seem to confirm Nyíri’s interpretation of state cultural authority. However, the boom in new placemaking projects, the increasing involvement of non-state actors, and the fact that the tourism desires of Chinese have turned to more heterogenous tourism destinations through the 1990s raises serious questions about a model of domestic tourism preoccupied with the exercise of state authority through clearly bounded and controlled tourist spaces.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Nyíri’s account got China’s tourists wrong because it lumped visitors to scenic spots into a single, homogenized subjectivity. In light of China’s new place-based urbanism, it is clear that the scenic spot model has two additional weaknesses.
First, Nyíri’s model adopts a category – the scenic spot – without critical assessment, taking it as an apparently naturalized basis for domestic tourism in China. Nyíri’s conclusion – that tourism development and tourist subjectivities are uniform and homogenous – is not surprising given China’s state vision of tourism as a mass consumption service to be standardized and regulated. However, as Bourdieu warned, “To endeavor to think the state is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, i.e. of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state” (Bourdieu 1999, 1). The cultural authority Nyíri argues is invested in scenic spots is neither stable nor complete. As noted in Chapter Two, the tourism industry is fragmented and uneven, even if it appears to be an integrated state project. And while the central state implicitly endorses tourist sites by granting ratings, the cultural and ideological content for these sites is unspecified in the rating criteria: Since 2003, China’s A-rating system for tourist sites (lúyòu qu/diàn, 旅游区/点) refers simply to their quality (zhiliàng, 质量), measured by twelve criteria including tourism transportation, safety, sightseeing, sanitation, shopping, management, and protection of natural resources and environment (ZJJJ 2003). While it is correct to say that the state has imposed a classificatory grid on China’s tourist sites, this does not tell us as much about the state’s cultural intentions.

The second weakness of the scenic spot model is that it gets contemporary strategies of tourism placemaking wrong. This is the main concern addressed by this chapter. Nyíri wrote:

In late socialist China, the notion of the scenic spot has been appropriated by the state’s
nation-building project and has become hegemonic in the tourism market due to the state’s
high degree of direct and indirect economic and political control of that sector... Encasement
and uniformity are prominent features of tourism development in China.” (2005, 58)

In seeing uniformity and homogeneity in Chinese domestic tourism, Nyíri presumes a
unity of place and culture, and of “cartographically coordinated space” ordered by the state (Lury 1997, 75). While Nyiri does acknowledge the transfer of management oversight of tourism from central to local state institutions (2005, 71), he overlooks the fact that the placemaking boom that has driven much of local economic growth over the last two decades has drawn tourism deeply into that project. His conclusion that the state’s pedagogical vision for tourist sites creates uniform, predictable, hegemonic forms of tourist space (ibid., 71) does not match up with many of the tourism places actually being produced in China.

Nyiri’s state-centric model may be helpful in understanding a historically-bounded aspect of state tourism development. It does tell us something about how the state may have envisioned tourism, and perhaps even what kind of thinking went into the renovation of cultural sites and the construction of theme parks in the 1980s. The production of place in China has indeed proceeded through strategies of state calculation and planning, especially employing visual displays and cultural theming. Many sites continue to seek out state tourism certification, as it means greater recognition and potential access to development funds. In their focus on representation and cultural authority, many scenic spots have been produced in a way that calls for expert interpretation. Even with the importance of the service sector economy and cultural development that was expressed in the Tenth Five-Year Plan (under Zhu Rongji) state paternalism remains strong in its official documents. The scenic spot model may even help explain why in an age of independent tourism we continue to see book-length surveys of China’s official scenic spots (see Zhu 2005). However, as China has commercialized and as Chinese desire more independent experiences, a static, state-centered theory of tourism development falls short in explaining the complex, multi-scaled changes that are transforming tourism places across the country, not to mention the development of new tourist subjectivities. Nyiri claimed to be interested in the modern citizen as consumer (2005, x-xi, 70, 98), but his
model of the state’s role in tourism development as implementing a centrally-imagined cultural vision is neither consistent with the individualization and diversification of tourism practices we’ve seen since 1992 (see discussion in Chapter Two), nor with placemaking strategies currently being implemented across China. Understanding these strategies facilitates a more robust understanding tourism in China, and we need to look beyond the theme park and the scenic spot models for help in thinking through the dynamism of domestic tourism in China today.

*Making places for exploring*

In April 2012, the urban studies magazine *Urban China* (Chengshi zhongguo, 《城市中国》) published a cover story on the way themed spaces are remaking China’s cities. An introductory essay framed the issue as the “theming of urban space under the force of tourism” (Kuang 2012, 24). Going back to the first generation of theme parks, which began in 1981 with the opening of a children’s park in Heilongjiang Province, the essay traces the history of theme park development – and more recent efforts at theming space – as a significant point of convergence between tourism development and property markets. This “tourism + property” model has become so prevalent, the essay argues, that it can be found not only in China’s largest cities, but it’s second- and third-tier cities as well (ibid., 25). Tourism + property effectively summarizes the discussion in this chapter so far, though more remains to be said about what those added terms equal.

The convergence of property development and tourism development has produced new kinds of places. *Urban China* approached these new places as variations on themeing, with theme parks as a foundational spatial form and themed space as an extension of the idea. While the magazine got the chronology right – theme parks (zhuti gongyuan, 主题公园) came before
the proliferation of themed spaces (zhuti kongjian, 主题空间) – it tended to conflate the two in service of its broader theme. In contrast to the theme parks, where the major distinction is the theme itself rather than the spatial form, contemporary themed urban spaces cover a wide range of patterns and uses. *Urban China* illustrated this diversity in a two-page visual (Figure 11) of old wharfs, ancient streets, concession areas, bar streets, old quarters, “Tiandi” commercial streets, food streets, film and television production sites, creative parks, antique markets, boutique hotels, and water towns (ibid., 28–29). Many of these themed spaces follow well-known and successful models, such as Nanjing’s Fuzimiao ancient street, Shanghai’s Xintiandi, and Beijing’s 798 Art District. While all but the most famous theme parks have faded from national attention, themed spaces have proliferated during the boom in place-based urbanism. All the more striking is the fact that many of these places have become cities’ top tourism sites, and have become nationally-rated scenic spots.

Nyiri’s scenic spot model is based on the idea of an “enclavic” tourist site (2005, 55), a controlled cultural and physical environment marked off for tourism by a carefully policed boundary (Edensor 2000, 328–329). Enclavic tourism spaces are,

```
designed for gazing. Theming imposes a visual order, a predictable spectacle of few
surprises. Accordingly, the pedestrian’s gaze is directed to particular attractions and
commodities and away from ‘extraneous chaotic elements,’ reducing ‘visual and functional
forms to a few key images’ (Rojek 1995, 62).
```

For Nyiri, the theme park is the archetypal enclavic tourist site in China, where, “the similarity of the experience of visiting a scenic spot [and] visiting a theme park helps explain why theme parks are themselves seen as scenic spots” (2005, 15, 50). However, what I see in *Urban China’s* visual survey is not simply variations of themed space, but rather evidence of a
significant turn in tourism placemaking. Instead of being firewalled from Chinese society as it was in the 1980s, tourism development has become a much higher priority in urban planning and development and has “spilled over” the old tourism site walls into the spaces of everyday life. The entanglement of tourism and property is a sign that the conceptual and material boundaries between exceptional spaces of tourism and the ordinary spaces of the city have blurred to the point where the distinction is no longer important. What we are seeing in China today is a turn to the production of heterogenous tourism space. One account of heterogenous tourism space explains it as:

organized as a cellular structure with numerous openings and passages, the flow of different bodies and vehicles criss-cross in multi-directional patterns, veering into courtyards, alleys, and cul-de-sacs. This means that although there may be particular streets where tourists
congregate and move, the options of movement through a labyrinthine structure provide opportunities for diverse walking performances and chance encounters. This stage provides contexts for a range of non-touristic social performances...from the commercial to the recreational, from the spectacular to the mundane, and from the industrial to the ritual (Edensor 2000, 331).

Heterogenous spaces are no less subject to planning, regulation and surveillance than enclavlic spaces (Edensor 2000, 332); they are just as much a part of governing practices of tourism as any other production of tourist space. This is the basis of Harvey’s and others’ critique of such projects. However, the strategic shift to the production of heterogenous tourism space has opened up new spatial practices where the role of self-organized (rather than expert-provided) knowledge has become more central.

Changes in placemaking strategies and tourist places track with one another, with movement away from concentrated sites of controlled consumption to a looser network of sites built for less determined experiences. New tourism places reflect the shift away from extraordinary tourist spaces for package tourists to ordinary, everyday spaces. In contrast to “pure” enclavlic tourism spaces, heterogenous spaces are produced to be accessible, to invite walking and wandering, to operate at a human scale, to be occupied and moved through in alternating rhythms of “touristic” and “everyday” action, rather than simply gazed at momentarily. Explorable place is made with certain kinds of movements in mind, certain skills, certain desires. Tourists are able to wander off a specified path on their own, and can “drop out” from tourism temporarily, for food, rest or to pursue a side interest.

The theme park and the scenic spot have been and remain the primary metaphors employed in studies of tourism in China, and each has been useful in analyzing certain aspects of tourism and society in post-reform China. But these are metaphors for enclavlic tourism
space, and we need a new metaphor to help think through the production of heterogenous
tourism space, and how it relates to a nation of self-organizing tourists. I propose that we think
about new tourism placemaking projects in China as the production of explorable place. As an
explanatory metaphor for tourism development in China, explorable place is meant to describe
tourism placemaking strategies that produce varieties of heterogenous tourism space, new
spaces of encounter between tourists and local residents, touristic and everyday life practices,
strategies of capital accumulation and new lived experiences of place. When I refer to
“explorable place,” I am referring to the strategic objectives behind a placemaking project that
opens up places for exploration by design. This may be as simple as inscribing a city street with
plaques or statues that recall elements of the neighborhood’s history, and may give a passerby
an otherwise untold story about the place. It can be as elaborate as establishing a new nature
reserve in an unknown corner of the country, or renovating an old factory complex. It is not a
certain type of place, but a specific spatial order established by making a place that encourages
exploration. Rather than a cultural history or a material location, exploration itself has become
 commodified. Rather than conveying a unified cultural narrative through authoritative texts or
personnel, explorable places provide more opportunities for the discovery of self, of place, and
of self-in-place. The actual types of new places being produced for tourism in China – old
towns, post-industrial creative parks, nature reserves – have continuities with past spatial
forms. Some are new and made explicitly explorable, while others, like Yading, recall older
models of state placemaking strategies even as tourists adopt a new stance of exploring.

I recognize how easily – perhaps unavoidably – the term “explorable place” slips from
being a heuristic tool to think with to being another categorical or typological model for
Chinese tourism (akin to “theme park,” or “scenic spot”). I wish to avoid this. Considering
Chinese tourism development as the production of explorable place is meant to be a way of
thinking through tourism placemaking strategies being implemented nationally that are as relevant to new constructions as they are to legacy tourism infrastructure.

Produced places inevitably betray their assumptions about how they should be visited, and about what sort of person is the ideal visitor. In many sites (re)built for tourism and leisure, the implied presence is not simply a gazing subject ready to be guided, but is above all a bodily presence – a desiring, individual presence. Many of China’s explorable places expect bodily practices much different than those of a traditional tourist site. Instead of being built to handle large groups walking close together after a guide along a predetermined route, many new sites set tourists “free” to explore back alleys, to stop in retail shops or art galleries, or have lunch on the street. As tourism and everyday life blend, these kinds of “tourist” practices echo more mundane practices of social life, from eating to shopping. The production of explorable place is not simply a function of new state governing strategies, or the result of imposition of a service sector on the population. It has been made possible by a population that desires exploration, that fulfills expectations of how they are supposed to fit in China’s new places.

Explorable place is different from what Dicks has called “visitable” places, or, places that attract visitors through public displays of culture and promise an experience of meaningfulness (2004, 8). Dicks argues that cultural display has become a central part of planning public space, and concludes that it is primarily concerned with cultivating model consumers rather than model citizens (ibid., 7–8). While she emphasizes visual representation in her list of the characteristics of cultural display (ibid., 8–13), Dicks includes aspects of display that have less to do with visibility than with bodily practice: Interactivity is sometimes built into displays. Visitors take a certain bodily comportment towards them. She describes culture as something one can enter and inhabit, and mentions “strolling/consuming” in urban and natural areas (ibid., 15, 18). These are telling in that the visual and the representational are dependent on the bodily.
This comparison highlights the conceptual difference between “visitable” places built to represent and display culture, and thus require expert interpretation, and “explorable” places built to capitalize on a more indeterminate experience akin to exploration.

The perceived homogeneity of the scenic spot paradigm – of tourist subjectivities and tourist spaces alike – elides the question of how these spaces are used. This is a key difference between visitable scenic spots and explorable places. The bodily knowledge of place tends to be ignored when analyzing the display and consumption of culture rather than the ways places are used, how tourists orient themselves toward them (expressing dissatisfaction, or avoidance). If themed spaces and scenic spots are what are typically thought of as “tourist” spaces, explorable places destabilize the simple correspondences between tourists and tourist spaces – as well as everyday life in ordinary spaces. Placemaking strategies have – like the desires of China’s domestic tourists themselves – spilled over the enclosed walls of official tourist sites. In contrast to places built to represent and display culture (and thus require expert interpretation), new places are being built to encourage a less determined experience. This is not to say explorable place has displaced cultural authority and themed display. It is just that these concepts don’t fully account for how places are being made for tourism and how tourists are using those places. As Vasantkumar correctly observed (2009), we are not seeing the replacement of previous modes of theme park tourism, but rather the emergence of an additional mode of tourism focused more on discovery (see discussion in Chapter Two). I would argue the same regarding scenic spots, that this enclavic mode of tourism in China is not going away, though the desires that have driven the age of independent tourism are demanding heterogenous tourist sites for exploring.
Explorable place

In the years leading up to the transformation of the Hongguang Cathode Ray Tube Factory, the river town of Pingle, about sixty miles to the southwest of Chengdu, was being transformed into the Pingle Ancient Town (Pingle guzhen, 平乐古镇). If the CCP’s industrialization of the southwest was the heritage employed in Eastern Suburb Memory, Pingle’s “tourism resources” run further back in time: The surrounding hillsides are scattered with Buddhist art from the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and a seven-arched bridge said to display a South Asian influence spans the Baimo River, both signs of Pingle’s importance as a stop on the Southwestern Silk Road (Xinan sichou zhilu, 西南丝绸之路) beginning in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). Archaeological surveys in 2005 discovered even older courier routes (Qinhan shidao, 秦汉驿道) dating to the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC). Pingle was a stop on the Tea-Horse Road (Cha ma gudao, 茶马古道) between Chengdu and Tibet, a trade established in the Tang Dynasty and that continued well into the 20th century. This multi-layered history (see PLZZ 2010) and the town’s picturesque location were drawn together by multiple placemaking projects that have turned Pingle into a popular tourism destination, especially for Chengdu residents. These projects would begin Pingle’s transformation into a guzhen (古镇), an “ancient town” made especially for tourism. And unlike the establishment of a clearly bounded enclavistic scenic spot, Pingle was made explorable through placemaking projects that renovated village streets and the riverfront, built a new “ancient street,” and constructed an outdoor adventure base that literally invited tourists to explore.

New placemaking projects in Pingle coincided with the opening of the Cheng-Wen-Qiong

---

39 Guzhen has been translated as “old town” (Anagnost 1993, 592), though “ancient” is what usually appears in official English translations of these towns’ names.
expressway in the fall of 2004, a beautifully-paved spur from the city’s west side that passes close to the town. I drove this road in August 2011, and upon arriving in Pingle was presented with one of those familiar brown cultural interest signs. The only cultural site marked on the map was something called the Pingsha Luoyuan Cultural and Commercial District. The rest of the locations were marked by a [P]: My choice was between the Core Area Large Parking Lot (240 spaces), the Ancient Town Ecology Parking Lot (210 spaces), and the Pingsha Luoyuan Parking Lot (120 spaces). I chose the Ancient Town Ecology Parking Lot and pulled up close to a tourist information center. The day of my visit, metal tabs hanging on the tourist center information board told me it was cloudy and 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and that the total tourist quantity was 84,698. I didn’t see anyone change it to 84,699 as I left the office and entered the old town center.

According to the Pingle annals produced by the town government (see PLZZ 2010, 252), the making of the ancient town began in 2000. That year, the Qionglaï city government, which administers Pingle, issued a tourism development plan focusing on “A Mountain, A City, A Town” that included a major project in Pingle.40 Setting aside the question of which local government deserves credit for the idea, the production of the ancient town began with the renovation of three streets in the town center, the construction of a park along the west riverbank, and a handful of other small projects. The repaving of the town center with flagstone (shibanlu, 石板路) was completed in 2003, and a renovation of the ancient town scenic area (jingqu, 景区) began in 2004, with the restoration (fugu, 复古) of buildings, and docks, the construction of traditional archway gates, and the installation of interpretive signage. By 2005, the “first stage of making a guzhen-style scenic area” was complete, as more streets were

---

dressed up in an “ancient style” (gu fengmao baozhuang, 古风貌包装) using traditional
construction materials – wooden boards, stone slabs, and roofing tiles. Construction continued
in 2007, with more flagstone paving, improvements made to local homes in the town center, and
the construction of a tourism center and the Ancient Town Ecology Parking Lot. However, by
this time a second placemaking project was already underway.

In 2001, China’s Tenth Five-Year Plan called for promoting cultural and creative industry
development (Zhu 2001), and a policy statement on cultural industries issued the following year
called for stronger cooperation between culture and tourism bureaus.4 In the following years,
tourism and cultural development – both of which have been primarily the domain of the
Communist Party state – converged on one another. And in 2009, the State Council issued a
plan to promote the development of cultural industries as a key strategy for economic
development.4 The plan was indicative of the hybrid nature of China’s economy, as cultural
industries were seen as a major part of developing a socialist culture in a marketized economy,
and would for the time being remain principally a state owned sector. A copy of the 2009 policy
is posted on the website of the Chengdu Culture and Tourism Development Group, a Chengdu
government owned development company that demonstrates the powerful convergence of
culture industries and tourism in a period of place-based urbanism.

The Chengdu Culture and Tourism Development Group, or Chengdu Wenlu as it is
known,43 is exemplary of what we might call state placemaking agents. Formed in 2007 by the
city government, Chengdu Wenlu’s first, most visible project was the conversion of a historic

---

4Zhongguo wang [China.org.cn]. Wenhua chanye fazhan di shige wunian jihua gangyao [Tenth Five Year Plan

cdctg.com/content/info/1-11-1_548.html (accessed 12 August 2014).

43“Wenlu” is short for Chengdu wenhua liyou fazhan jitian youxian zeren gongsi (成都文化旅游发展集团有限责任公司).
quarter of back alleys into Kuan Zhai Xiangzi, a commercialized, mixed-use leisure and tourism
development that has become one of Chengdu’s most popular tourism destinations. That
project turned a historical district the city government had recognized two decades earlier (but
left undeveloped) into one of China’s most visible heterogenous tourism spaces, one that not
only draws many people (ten million tourists pass through those alleys in an average year44) but
that caters to a wide variety of interests, and is touted as symbolic of an entire way of life (see
Klingberg and Oakes 2012). Chengdu Wenlu calls developments like Kuan Zhai Xiangzi branded
projects (pinpai xiangmu, 品牌项目), and it followed its success in transforming an old, inner
city neighborhood into an explorable place with a similar project targeting Pingle.

In 2008, Chengdu Wenlu and the Qionglai city government signed a cooperation
agreement to invest US$163m in the construction of an “internationally-famous leading ancient
village brand.”45 In 2010, Chengdu Wenlu opened two new projects in Pingle. The first, named
for a classical song, was the Pingsha Luoyan Cultural Commerce Area (Pingsha luoyan wenhua
shangyejie qu, 平沙落雁文化商业街区), an ancient quarter (fanggujie, 仿古街) that rather than
being based on renovations of existing warrens of existing streets, was an entirely new
construction built on the site of agricultural warehouses on the periphery of Pingle’s village
center. Like Eastern Suburb Memory, there are no danwei walls or ticket windows to separate
this new place from the old one. Like the rest of Pingle, local residents and tourists mix in the
same spaces and pass through the overlapping places. In contrast to Pingle’s main street with
the reconstructed “ancient” feel (Figure 12), the Chengdu Wenlu development feels more sterile,

44Chengdu wenhua lüyou fazhan youxian zeren gongs [Chengdu Culture and Tourism Development Group].
45Chengdu ribao [Chengdu Daily]. http://www.cdrb.com.cn/html/2008-09/19/content_260004.htm (accessed 12 Au-
gust 2014).
more commercialized (Figure 13), though it nevertheless fits in with – and adds to – the
heterogeneity of Pingle as a tourism site.

Chengdu Wenlu’s second project in Pingle opening at the same time was the Golden
Rooster Valley (Jinjigu, 金鸡谷), a tributary valley of the Baimo River remade into an outdoor
adventure base, with a rock climbing wall and suspension foot bridge stretching 500 feet above
the valley. The information office in Pingsha Luoyan promoted the Golden Rooster Valley
through photographs, a scale model of the valley, and an introduction to the bridge:

A cable bridge is built between two soaring mountains. It’s 318 meters long, 1.5 meters wide,
162 meters high. Maybe it’s not the longest cable bridge, not the highest cable bridge, [but]
it is the most dangerously steep, the most beautiful, the grandest bridge.... Please pay attention when...walking.

One of the brochures I picked up there was the 42-page “Golden Rooster Valley Explorer Diary” (Tanxianzhe shouji, 探险者手记) (Figure 14) produced by Chengdu Wenlu, with cartoon backpackers introducing the valley and how to prepare for a visit. I followed the instructions and crossed a weir in the Baimo river to the mouth of the valley. A brown sign pointed the way to the No. 1 Rock Climbing Camp, the No. 2 Rock Climbing Camp, the No. 3 Rock Climbing Camp, the Railway-style Climbing Entrance (a Via ferrata), and the Railway-style Climbing Exit. The sign also told me exactly where I stood: 30 degrees 20 minutes 34 seconds north latitude, 103 degrees 18 minutes 22 seconds east longitude, at 533 meters elevation. I knew where I was and where I was going, ready for exploring this explorable place.
Figure 14: Pingle “Golden Rooster Valley Exploration Map” (promotional material).

In the wake of these placemaking projects and their marketing, tourism to Pingle exploded. In 2004 fewer than 10,000 tourists made it to Pingle; two years later tourism jumped to 1.3 million.46 Pingle is now one of Chengdu’s top sites, at times drawing more visitors than the municipality’s other ancient towns, and even the Dujiangyan irrigation project site.47 In 2013, Pingle reportedly saw 3.2 million tourists48 – 400,000 of them came during the seven-day National Holiday in October.49 As with Eastern Suburb Memory, most tourists to Pingle are

---

46 Interview, Pingle tourism official, 11 August 2011.


from the Chengdu area, though estimates range from about 60 percent to 95 percent. A small 2011 survey (Zhou 2011) of 43 tourists in Pingle found that well over half of them were locals from Chengdu and Qionglai, the rest were split from other parts of Sichuan or from outside the province; eighteen of them had been had been to Pingle before.\footnote{These numbers are a rough approximation based on the percentages reported.}

Pingle is a case study in the production of explorable place. It demonstrates how the making of heterogenous tourism spaces for exploring tourists is a placemaking strategy as useful in rural towns as in major cities. It doesn’t matter that there is no dominant tourist site here, or that, as a senior Pingle tourism official admitted to me, the “guzhen bu gu” – the ancient town isn’t ancient. What does seem to matter, to the tune of millions, is that new tourism places open up a variety of tourism options rather than concentrate tourism in a single, authoritative experience.

Chengdu Wenlu and the Chengdu Media Group are two of the city’s largest placemakers, with hands in some of the city’s most popular new sites. They are at the forefront of placemaking strategies to develop leisure and tourism sites that fit with the state’s economic priorities.\footnote{Fenghuang xin meiti ben [Phoenix New Media]. Chengdu chuanmei Chengdu wenlù lingpao Chengdu wen-hua chanye [Chengdu Media Group, Chengdu Wenlù lead Chengdu cultural industries]. http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2010_11/04/2994727_0.shtml (accessed 12 August 2014).} In 2010, Chengdu Wenlu, the Chengdu Media Group, and the Chengdu Tourism Association organized an online poll asking the public to choose Chengdu’s “New Ten Sites” for tourism. A news story with the results from over a thousand responses was posted on the
Chengdu city government website (Table 1). In comparing these “old” and “new” tourism sites, we can see differences between places that we might call traditonal or conventional tourism sites in China and places made to be explorable. Where the conventional ten sites offer site-specific experiences of Sichuan cultural heritage, most of the New Ten offer experiences of neighborhoods, villages, and nature areas. Kuan Zhai Xiangzi, for example, presents an encounter with an urban past – of teahouses and outdoor dining in a traditional neighborhood setting. Sansheng Huaxiang, at Chengdu’s southeastern fringe, offers city residents a rural place to escape to, with backroads to drive and bike, “happy farmer homes” for meals or tea, flower markets, and art galleries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chengdu’s “Ten Sites”</th>
<th>Chengdu’s “New Ten Sites”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dujiangyan</td>
<td>Giant Panda Research Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qingchengshan</td>
<td>Kuan Zhai Xiangzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuhouci</td>
<td>Sansheng Huaxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dufu’s Thatched Cottage</td>
<td>Jinsha museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wangjing Lou</td>
<td>Jinli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qingyang Gong</td>
<td>Anren Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baoguang Si</td>
<td>Huanglongxi Ancient Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenshu Yuan</td>
<td>Guoese Tianxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xilingxueshan</td>
<td>Pingle Ancient Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiantaishan</td>
<td>Huanle Gou</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chengdu’s New Ten Sites are explorable in that they tend to invite tourist digressions rather than convergences. Instead of building tourism as a sequenced encounter of a particular building or view, these sites are structured for wandering and a more “leisured” tourism experience. The placemaking projects that made the list of Chengdu’s New Ten Sites are indicative of national patterns of capital investment, service sector growth, and tourism

---

development. Once a few successful models have been established – whether preservation districts, old towns, art districts, or nature reserves – they tend to be replicated nationally. Whatever similarities we see happening across China does not come from an explicit national placemaking policy, but rather through a trial-and-error process of avoiding placemaking models that fail and capitalizing on those that work.

A geography of exploring

A mountain stands at the center of the Daocheng county seat. There’s a sign on the mountain that reads, “Do not climb” (Figure 15). At night, scores of people gather at its feet and dance, and in the morning, the white peak shines over the silent square. Given the importance of the Yading Nature Reserve to the county, it’s fitting that Daocheng’s central square – in the place where a stone statue of Mao Zedong might stand – Daocheng has a twenty-foot tall fiberglass snow mountain. The mountain and the pedestrian shopping street nearby are signs that placemaking sensibilities have touched this remote town, even if the elements are rudimentary compared with the more intensively developed spectacles of Chengdu.

While the production of explorable place is an urban-born project it is not limited in scope to the city. We see the extension of this placemaking logic into the countryside around Chengdu, in the handful of ancient towns that are popular tourism destinations, and of the overlap between privately-run “happy farmer homes” and the appropriation of the idea by Chengdu’s Jinjiang district government in the creation of Sansheng Huaxiang, one of Chengdu’s New Sites built on a rural model. This placemaking logic has also pushed into Ganzi Prefecture. Along the “Western Sichuan Tourism Loop,” Kangding is inscribed with its tea-trade history and Xinduqiao is presented as a photographer’s dream. And the road that traces out the “Shangrila Premier Route,” which extends to Yading, is dotted with scenic platforms and cultural
markers of small sites along the journey – mountain passes, monasteries, the Haizishan nature reserve, the small patch of red grass along the highway that has become one of Daocheng’s most photographed sights. Sichuan Province’s western region in all its forms – Western Sichuan (Chuanxi, 川西), Ganzi Prefecture (Ganzizhou, 甘孜州), Kham (Kangqu, 康区), Tibetan areas (Zangqu, 藏区), Shangrila (Xianggelila, 香格里拉) – has been discursively presented and materially outfitted to be explorable.

In this network of tourism places, we can see place-focused development strategies aimed at extending the urban tourist experience into the remote areas of eastern Tibet. These place-based changes not only influence modes of place production through processes of investment, planning, and construction, but also influence modes of experiencing place. We can also see how across Ganzi a new kind of tourist is being addressed, as places and regions are
designed to accommodate and encourage self-organized leisure experiences. While the New Sites of Chengdu illustrate how interrelated placemaking projects and independent tourism practices have become, Yading shows in greater relief the tension between the kinds of self-organized experiences that Chinese increasingly desire and the legacy of state-centered approaches to developing place.

Yading didn’t exist before a certain point in China’s history. The territorial idea of a tourist site centered on Yading’s three sacred peaks did not exist at least before 1982, when the idea for a nature reserve was presented publicly (see Chapter Five). In the county’s official register of names published in 1986, Yading referred to a small village close to the three sacred peaks, with the river gully below it said to be full of placer gold (DDLX 1986, 52). In 1997, a year after the Yading Nature Reserve was officially established, the new county annals (covering years between the late Qing to 1990) (SDXB 2009, 1) still referred to Yading as a village, appearing only in descriptions of the county’s physical geography and in a sentence reporting that three acres of village land had been improved for agriculture (SDXB 1997, 111). In subsequent government histories – a yearbook in 2004 (DXRZ 2004), another gazetteer in 2009 (SDXB 2009), and another yearbook in 2010 (DCXR 2010) – Yading refers to something entirely new, to the nature reserve that covers most of the southern end of the county, and more specifically to the scenic area focused on one particular valley. Today, more than its village namesake, and more than the larger biodiversity conservation project, Yading refers to a tourism development project.

Yading was opened officially for tourism in 1999, and by 2001 the county government, with the help of the Sichuan Province Tourism Bureau, created a 131-page tourism master plan for
the county. The plan covered the basics of transforming Yading into a tourism destination – rudimentary hotels, scenic platforms, walking trails, and repairs to the monastery at the center of the park. In the years that followed, tourism increased steadily, with tourist visits to the county doubling every five years. A road was built over the mountains directly into Yading Village, and better intercity roads were planned in every direction. The local government began implementing projects outside the scope of the original plan: The horse tracks worn into the old pilgrimage route were paved with concrete, and a small fleet of tourist carts were brought in to shuttle tourists six high-elevation miles up the valley. A network of wooden walkways with rest pavilions and scenic viewing platforms was built to keep the growing numbers of visitors off the wetland grasses. From my first visit in 1999 to my fieldwork visits between 2009 and 2011, Yading’s development lagged behind more established sites such as Jiuzhaigou National Park, and never showed the same efficiency and thoughtful planning.

In terms of a tourism development project, Yading is different from the examples of placemaking discussed in this chapter. Unlike projects with greater access to economic and political resources – such as Pingle Ancient Town – the Daocheng County government and the Yading Nature Reserve management office’s attempts at building a modern tourism site in this remote mountain valley have been only moderately successful. During my research, Yading felt poorly planned and half-finished. The structural shell of a tourism center occupied an oddly prominent place in Yading’s most famous valley, the sheet metal roof rising three stories over an area the size of a soccer field. Maps displayed throughout the park indicated this was an “Integrated Service Station,” with a wheelchair-accessible Chinese restaurant and first aid

\[^{54}\text{Daocheng xian renmin zhengfu, Sichuan sheng lüyou guihua shejisuo [Daocheng County People’s Government, Sichuan Provincial Tourism Planning and Design Office]. 2001 Daocheng xian lüyou fazhan zongti guihua [Daocheng county tourism development overall plan].}\]
station, though during my visit the half-built shell served simply as a shelter for tourists queueing for the shuttle down the valley. There were other signs that the tourism construction within Yading hadn’t worked out as planned. Some points marked on the map didn’t exist.

There were gift shops and tourism information services indicated, there were signs for an audio tour, and a ropeway built from the trailhead. None of these existed in the park, and there was no sign of construction underway.

I witnessed only incremental changes in Yading during my field research – walkways paved with stones, shifting crowd management strategies, and the destruction and rebuilding of the old herding huts in the park, the ones that park staff had always been proud to point out were where botanist-turned-explorer (and “discoverer” of Yading) Joseph Rock stayed in the late 1920s. Full-sized trees grew in the middle of the road through the park, the concrete simply poured around them. The road itself, which roughly follows the old pilgrimage path, makes awkward hairpin turns, including one on a hillside where I was twice almost a part of a collision between tourist shuttles. I knew such crashes had happened before. Among a half-dozen junked tourist shuttles hidden from tourist view behind a maintenance hut along the road were two badly damaged from front-end collisions. The others were also badly damaged: windows had round holes through them, headlights were smashed. I knew that in 2007 some local residents had protested the tourism infrastructure construction that threatened the income they made from guiding horse rides, which could amount to a third or more of annual income. An altercation with police near the county seat ended with two deaths, the whole situation leading to the temporary closure of the reserve and infrastructure development suspended.

The path for future development of the Yading Nature Reserve looks like it will follow Jiuzhaigou as a package tourism destination. With the high status it now has in the Sichuan provincial government, the new airport that opened in 2013, the road improvements underway,
and the established success of the Jiuzhaigou model to go on, the redoubled efforts to develop
the reserve for tourism that began in 2011 will likely accelerate the making of a conventional
scenic spot. However, even if these changes establish a tourism machine for Daocheng County,
Yading’s rise to national fame over the past fifteen years came not through a central or even a
provincial state development priority, but rather through a combination of influential media
reports (inscribing practices) and the lived experiences of independent tourists themselves
(incorporating practices). Yading has been remote and difficult to access, requiring two to four
days of travel in addition to a day or two to visit the reserve; it’s a week-long trip for most
Chengdu residents driving their own vehicle. The time, distance, and relative isolation from
other tourism sites made this an unattractive place for package tourism operators, but perfect
for self-organized tourism oriented toward exploration.

To simply call Yading a scenic spot is to miss out on the fact that at least for the first 15
years of its existence it was a place that almost required its visitors to adopt the role of explorer,
simply because the rudimentary infrastructure in and around the reserve placed a greater
demand on the knowledge and resources of tourists than is typical of a package tourist. There is
a significant disparity between the ways Yading is presented as a national landscape of scenic
beauty and the rough edges of actually being a tourist there – the high elevation, fast-changing
alpine weather, the lack of tourism services, food, and shelter, the intensity of walking (even
with the horse rides and shuttle). Yading cannot but be explored, though in this sense the theme
of exploration as a commodified experience manufactured through a placemaking project
crosses over into another sense. While the minimal tourism infrastructure in Yading intends to
make the park a visitable, scenic experience, I believe that part of what has drawn people to
Yading is the fact of the challenge of going there, the sense of remoteness and mystery paying
off the desire to get off the beaten track of package tourism and beat a new track in the
mountains and Tibetan areas.

In the mid–1990s, one scholar observed that “the absence of Chinese visitors to Tibet
shows the cultural influence of the domestic tourist’s perception of remote places. It also
reflect[s] the disdain for minorities among the dominant Han Chinese” (Petersen 1995, 151).

While this inevitably would describe some Chinese, the huge crowds in so many minority areas
during long public holidays – to the point of traffic jams55 – are a sign that this just isn’t
completely the case any longer, if it ever was. China’s remote and “ethnic” places have become
some of the nation’s most desirable tourism destinations, and independent tourism has been at
the forefront of bringing China’s borderlands into the heart of the national geo-body.

---

55Woodhead, Michael. 2013. The traffic jam on top of the world: the Chinese boom busts into Tibet. Crikey. 9 De-
tibet/(accessed 14 April 2014).
Day four. “Is that a mule or a horse?,” Zhou Liang asked as we walked the edges of a rutted trail soaked with rain and manure. It was a question he asked a number of times during the day, and he never received a conclusive answer. The trail linked Longtongba, the trailhead for the Yading Nature Reserve scenic area, with the Chonggu Monastery, a small monastery perched on a glacial till. When dry, the trail was a pleasant walk among trees hung with moss, a river rushing around boulders, and cairns of white stones placed by pilgrims. For a hundred years, and probably many dozens before that, this trail was worn in as pilgrimage route leading around Yading’s mountains. When wet, the trail was a bog, and it was best to dance along its shoulder. This was only the second time that Zhou had walked at length on an unpaved path, and he became interested in the animals as they passed. Zhou had grown up in Chengdu, a municipality with 16 million people. Like many Chinese, while he enjoyed traveling, his experience of mountain hiking mostly involved stone paths and staircases set into mountains like Sichuan’s E’mei, one of the five great Buddhist mountains in China.

Zhou’s group and I had set out from our guesthouse early enough to be on the trail at 8:30, though the tourist shuttles ferrying in the day’s hundreds from the tourist center 23 miles away were packed upon arrival in the village. Some buses would stop and drop off passengers
checking into guesthouses, as we had the day before, leaving a bit of space for waiting tourists
to press into for the rest of the ride downhill. But some of the buses would simply barrel
through, air horns bending sour as they passed and the shrugging waves of the divers miming.
“Nothing can be done.” Tired of waiting, I suggested we walk. I knew the path that Yading
villagers used as they lead their horses to work.

We followed the road downhill to a sharp, switchback turn marked by a convex mirror.
Continuing along the road was an option, but its vehicle-friendly grade and winding
switchbacks would add twenty minutes of walking. I lead them over the edge of the hillside.
One by one we grew large in the mirror, and then disappeared off the edge as we stepped over
the new vehicle guardrail anchored in concrete. After a twenty minute downhill walk, a full
four days after our departure from Chengdu, we arrived at Longtongba for the beginning of our
day in the scenic area. We walked straight past a multipurpose building with a restaurant,
police station, and management offices to the timber corral where horses rested between trips
carrying tourists like us uphill. Zhou and his group were not interested. Instead of lining up at
the rails we walked on, making our own way upstream, along what Yading’s official maps called
the Snow Mountain Silver River.

We walked at a lowlander’s pace. Every few minutes a shush or a whinny would approach
from behind, and a local guide, reins in hand, would call out to make way for the smiling tourist
on horseback. We had to step into the bush to let them pass. It was early September, about four
weeks before the National Day holiday, when thousands of tourists and hundreds of horses and
guides would turn this old pilgrimage route into a rush hour mess. Some guides would literally
run the trail with their horses to help alleviate the crowds that backed up at the horse stations.

Placed among the trailside cairns were slabs of slate and schist carved with the mantra Om
Mani Padme Hum. An interpretive sign gave the gully a name – The Long Corridor of Mani Stones (Figure 16). It explained:

“Mani” is short for the Six Syllable Mantra. Mani stones are polished stones with scripture carved on the surface. Tibetan people always place a Mani stone on the cairn and turn around the cairn clockwise when they pass, thus completing the equivalent of one recitation of the mantra. It is a way to pray. ...Since thousands years ago people began to place the Mani stone on the cairn, when they walked around the mountain, so the today’s long corridor of Mani stone cairn had been formed.

![Image of the Long Corridor of Mani Stones](image.png)

Figure 16: “The Long Corridor of Mani Stones” (author photo).

The trail we walked was marked on official maps as the Ecological Packway, which sounds like something well designed, possibly even “sustainable,” though in reality anyone not on horseback had to walk the edges of the path and cut into the scrub. After about thirty minutes of this, the trail widened at Zhaguanbeng, where tourists dismounted their animals and would continue farther into the scenic area. The sign read:
In Tibetan “Zha” means “cliff” [or] “rock,” “guan” means “a self-cultivation place,” “beng” means “grassland” or “lawn.” A long time ago, a hierarch did self-cultivation here, and his cave-dwelling [has] been kept here...

Just above Zhaguanbeng a dry gravel path rose above the river and the treetops, providing us with a view of Shenrezig. Once over that rise, the trail opened onto the Chonggu Grassland, a stunning, glaciated valley framing Chanadorje. This is the place – not the tourist center, or Yading Village, or Longtongba – that confirmed our arrival in Yading. Unlike the comparable experience at Long Lake in Jiuzhaigou, where crowds press up against a single viewing platform, and where traditional Tibetan costumes are available for tourists to rent and pose in, the arrival at the Chonggu Grassland was less of a spectacle, with boardwalks, paved paths, and a concrete road spidering farther up the valley, but no souvenir stands, guides or loudspeakers, and little in the way of culturalized display. The interpretive and directional signage were most of what we had to go on.

The maps, boardwalks, service buildings, and signage that create the pathways for tourism in Yading are all part of a tourism development project aimed at making the nature reserve fit within the state tourism geography. But Yading’s distance from any major transportation hub and from any major city has meant that most tourists who arrive have organized their own trip and made their own way. While Yading was built on the Jiuzhaigou model – of a nature destination tailored for mass tourism – and with hopes that a tourism machine could be built here, most of the tourists who arrive here have been independent travelers. You could see this in the parking lot, which was full of SUVs and sedans rather than tour buses. And of the 19,251 tourists who visited the scenic area during the 2010 National Holiday, 80 percent of them
bought full price tickets: Tour companies typically negotiate discounted entry as part of the
tour package.

We can observe the ordering effects of independent tourism not only in the production of
eraser and periurban tourist sites, but also in the transposition of placemaking strategies into
remote areas like Daocheng county. In addition to the conventional ways that “official”
geographic information is communicated – through the national magazine stories, the
guidebooks, and the interpretive signage – we can see new acts of geographic knowledge
generation and transfer at work in the tourist experience of Yading. These new acts of transfer –
the particular ways that knowledge and memory are transmitted that make collective knowing
and remembering possible (Connerton 1989, 39–40; Taylor 2003, 2) – are indicative of the
broader ways that Chinese today have engaged place, both as a leisure landscape constructed
for them and as an individually and collectively lived experience. The preceding chapters have
approached this shift by focusing on the overall turn toward independent tourism in China, as
well as the intensified placemaking practices of building explorable places. This chapter brings
these changes together by elaborating on acts of geographic knowledge transfer themselves, on
the knowledge practices that have harnessed the national impetus to create explorable places
with the national desire to explore place.

Over the past twenty years the knowledge practices that create and sustain geographic
knowledge about China have been revalued. China’s neoliberal/socialist state remains in a
dominant position regarding China’s official geography – its national territory and internal
political administration, its sites of military and national security importance, its economic
centers and its “backward” regions. Much geographic information about China – maps,
topography, GPS data – is classified as a state secret. And the state remains in control of the
national narrative, the story of the liberation of the Chinese people from the tyrannies of
colonialism and feudalism, the formation and establishment of the People’s Republic under Mao Zedong and the Communist Party, the reform and opening begun by Deng Xiaoping, and subsequent changes to China’s political and economic system that have balanced national security and political stability with economic growth and social transformation. State narratives of victory and success are intertwined with narratives of victimization and loss, and all are anchored in the propositional knowledge of a national geo-body, the shared discourse of the territorial body of the nation (Callahan 2004; Callahan 2009). The state’s management of geographic information and narratives employs an institutional and cultural archive of propositional knowledge about China, which can be cognized, reported, shared and inscribed in texts, maps, images, plans, and the built environment.

In addition to the propositional knowledge about China that is so critically important to geographic discourse and representation, the practical knowledge of how to live in China has become a valuable and central part of how China is known today. We can trace the changing importance of a practical knowledge of China – the non-cognized, un-self-reflexive capacities or skills developed through lived experience – through the rise of an industrial economy reliant on rural migrant laborers who have moved from countryside to city and adapted to new urban lives (Zhang 2001) and adopted a new consciousness of their place in the nation (Pun 2004; Chang 2009). We can trace the growing influence of practical knowledge through the boom in self-help literature (Farquhar 2001) and the expression of desire in social life (Farquhar 2002; Rofel 2007). And we can trace the development and influence of practical knowledge through the past twenty years of changing leisure practices, particularly in the shift in tourism away from the control of “expert” tourism knowledge by professionals to the pervasive network of peer-generated tourism knowledge available on the Internet. All of these point to a fundamental change in the knowledge practices fundamental to the national geo-body. In terms
of tourism specifically, the shift has been toward a more diversified, decentralized, and individualized transmission of tourism knowledge, which as Nyiri rightly pointed out is implicitly tied to the territorial knowledge of China as a nation (2005, 17).

The geographic knowledge sought out and put to use by independent tourists today does not simply reflect the propositional knowledge used in official discourses and representations about China as place, region, or nation. This is apparent on the trail in Yading, where the experiences and interests of tourists are different in content and tone from the stiff messaging on reserve signage. While continuing to rely on this official knowledge, most important for independent tourists is the practical knowledge of how to travel, how other people have traveled, and how one can gain experience of one’s own through travel. As Chinese have sought out new places to explore, the knowledge of China as a territory – as a geo-body – has changed. The dominance of the centralized, hegemonic knowledge put to use by the state in the creation of the Chinese nation (see Fitzgerald 1995) has become less relevant to Chinese seeking knowledge about China’s territory that is more up-to-date, more specific to time and place, and simply more useful when traveling. This geographic knowledge is different from the kind necessary for a political movement seeking to establish the territoriality of the nation, and more important for sustaining a nation through the practices of its citizens.

To begin unpacking the political importance of tourism in China today, it is important to understand that new actors have become more engaged in geographic knowledge production than was the case in the early reform and Mao eras. By recognizing the active role of tourists themselves in ordering knowledge, we also must understand that the acts of transfer themselves – the ways that geographic information about China is generated and conveyed – have been revalued. The knowledge of place valued through independent tourism has increasingly become ordered through bodily practices – real actions by real bodies in real places. As generations of
state explorers – the officials and scholars operating within a state knowledge project (see Chen 2008) – once traveled China, today a nation of lay geographers (Crouch 2000), the nation’s citizen-explorers, have become part of a new politics of geographic knowledge production.

Bodily practices of exploration were not only important to agents of the state during the creation of China’s geo-body, but continue to be fundamental to ordinary explorers. As China has taken to travel, exploring place has become a shared routine among a growing population. This chapter argues that place is important in China not simply as a destination for travel or a strategic production that serves to order a new service-based economy, but as a spatial practice of *exploring place*, of coming to know the interconnections between self, social relationships, specific places, and one’s wider world through a spatial body that articulates this knowledge. The new boom in domestic independent tourism in China should be recognized not simply for generating new propositional knowledge, but for concurrently generating a practical, collectively shared, bodily knowledge of place.

Human geography has been heavily influenced by the work of Lefebvre, especially that aspect of his analysis that he called representations of space (Lefebvre 1991, 33), the dominant conceptualization of space in a society corresponding to the space of capital, the state, and the bourgeoisie (Merrifield 2006, 109). However, central to understanding Lefebvre’s goal in analyzing the production of space are the other two elements in his spatial triad, the spaces of representation (spaces of everyday life and perception) and the spatial practices through which a full social conception of space is developed through the mediations of space as conceived and and as perceived (ibid., 110). While Lefebvre’s overall approach has been influential (see Harvey 1989; Soja 1999), his goal in *The Production of Space* was not simply analyzing how space is produced under capitalism, but what the spatial nature of life under such a system was. Lefebvre had two insights along these lines that inform this chapter. First, the life and practice
of the body was centrally important in understanding the dialectical nature of space. For Lefebvre, the body is both the point of departure from the dominant conception of an abstracted, purified space that “contains” human life, and the destination for understanding the potentialities of lived space, the spatio-temporal rhythms of lived practice: “Considered overall, social practice presupposes the use of body.... The perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces) loses all force if it is treated as an abstract ‘model’” (1991, 40). Lefebvre was concerned not only with the dialectical relationship between space as conceived and perceived, but with the creative tension of that relationship as it plays out through spatial practices. Second, in addition to identifying the body’s central role in spatial practices, Lefebvre challenged the idea that bodies can only be understood as embedded within the dominant socio-spatial order. This is a critically important point. Lefebvre wrote,

How can we expect to define a critical space if we start out by accepting a body inserted into this already ‘social’ space – and mutilated by it? ...A body so conceived, as produced and as the production of a space, is immediately subject to the determinants of that space: symmetries, interactions and reciprocal actions, axes and planes, centres and peripheries, and concrete (spatio-temporal) oppositions (1991, 195).

Lefebvre is not saying that the body is free from conceived space, but rather that conceived space can never be total, that productions of space do not and cannot account for all human action or experience. This has been an underemphasized element in Lefebvre’s work, and one that is important in the discussion of place in human geography. To leave out spatial practice (or an equivalent third term of the dialectic) would be to leave the concept of place inert, stuck in the bifurcation of place as a political economic or discursive production and place
as a phenomenological experience. Considering the work devoted to one side or the other (see Harvey 1997; Tuan 1980), and even at working around the problem (Massey 1992; see Cresswell 2004), my sense is that all of these perspectives on place are valuable in their own way, but that place as an analytical tool has been reduced to parts lying on the geographer’s workbench, too fragmented to be of much use. This is where Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial body at the center of spatial practices is important: Spatial practices are not simply what results from a two-sided conflict between the dominant spatial order and resisting bodies (see Schmid 2008, 33–34). Spatial practices are themselves an equal term in a three-way dialectical relationship, the site where the dominant conceptions of space and the sensory and corporeal experience of everyday life are articulated. This chapter approaches independent tourism as a spatial practice of exploring place. Exploring place is not aimed at formulating a phenomenological response to a state project of placemaking. As Lefebvre put it, to do so would mean “the ‘lived’ will remain on the level of a phenomenology” (Lefebvre 2008, 216). It is, rather, positioned as a way to think past this simple opposition to consider the creative, even poetic acts (Schmid 2008, 33) that are possible through tourism.

In Chapter Three, I approached the production of explorable place as a way of ordering tourism place, and I drew on Lefebvre’s comments on the importance that the transformation of space has for any truly revolutionary project. In this chapter, my attention turns to the role of the body in place, a topic on which Lefebvre had similar thoughts:

Any revolutionary ‘project’ today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda. (1991, 166–167)

We have seen a project like this unfold in contemporary China, and there has been
valuable work addressing the body-focused project of nation-making, spanning the body as political target (Brownell 1995; Farquhar and Zhang 2005; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005) and the body as a lived, sexed experience (Rofel 2007). We know that the body – laboring, compliant bodies especially – has been centrally important in China’s nation-making project. These insights are no less important in thinking through the past twenty years of change in tourism in China: Tourist bodies are centrally important in what has changed.

“Place,” as a core concept in human geography, has typically been understood in three ways – as a site or location in space; as a setting or a locale where social and political life unfolds (such as a home or workplace, a virtual world or a vehicle); or as a sense of connection and belonging (Agnew 2005). While these definitions tend to overlap, as conceptual categories they often lead to somewhat mutually exclusive positions. One of the most influential discussions of place in geography centered on the assertion that a sense of place doesn’t adequately take into account the political and economic production of place as site and setting (see Cresswell 2004). While working to break down the meaning of place along these lines is helpful in understanding the ambiguity of the term, focusing only on the differences between definitions tends to emphasize a bifurcation, and occlude the ways that “place” encompasses all of them.

Instead of attempting to further elaborate on these distinctions, I’m more interested in their interrelationship and on how it is that place as an idea remains powerful despite these apparently fragmented meanings. For my purposes here, the categorical distinctions between place as site, setting, and sense are less important than the knowledge practices engaged in knowing place in any of its conceptual forms. Instead of counterposing the production of place
as a site and setting with that of the phenomenological encounter in place formative of a sense of meaning, I’m interested in the knowledge practices that underlie this apparent contradiction.

We’ve already seen along the trail in Yading different practices of knowing place: Place can be known – and presented as knowable – through the propositional knowledge put into language, texts, images, maps, narratives, or other representations. These inscribing practices are what create and link representations of place with specific sites, and are fundamental to knowing place as a setting for political, economic, and social life. They are also centrally important in defining and mobilizing a shared sense of place, particularly through practices of narration (Tuan 1991). As Chapter Three showed, inscribing practices are fundamental to placemaking strategies in China, which mobilize place through the transformation of the site and setting (land transfers, planning, and construction) and the sense of place (the rupture of old place connections and the flourishing of new connections).

While inscribing practices are observable primarily through the discourses and representations of technological and institutional networks (see Kittler 1990), place is also known in practical ways through embodied experience and practice. The walking in Yading, the bodily orientation to elevation, climate, and topography, the exertion and rest – all of which enable seeing the reserve – are constitutive of a knowledge of how to move in and pursue interests and needs in a new environment. Place can be known non-cognitively through complete sensory experience and felt presence. The formation of this kind of practical knowledge comes through what we can call incorporating practices, ways of generating and remembering knowledge of place in the body itself (Connerton 1989). This is different from the ways that a phenomenology of place is typically cast, as something meaningful as a narrative of home or the reactionary claim to territory.

Incorporating practices are fundamental to how we know place in all of its conceptual
forms. Bodily practices of knowing – through locomotion, action, energy, sensation, desire, orientation and comportment – are inseparable from the inscribing practices that abstract the experience of place into a cognized form. And by focusing on both the inscribing and incorporating practices that sustain our knowledge of place, we can employ place as a concept in a way that encompasses the apparent contradictions between political economic production and phenomenology. Place is a practice that is dynamic, unbounded, internally conflicted (Massey 1992), an act of knowledge transfer conveying, sustaining, as well as creating the cognized and non-cognized sense of continuity and even permanence (Connerton 1989, 39–40). Approaching place as a knowledge practice rather than as a conceptual category turns the focus away from what place means to the inscribing and incorporating practices of spatial bodies that constitute the possibility of place knowledge. The issue at hand, in other words, is not what conception of place best describes what is happening in contemporary China, but rather how the knowledge practices employed in constituting place in China relate to one another and what political ramifications exist.

The new value of practical geographic knowledge of China is evident in both the growing number of places and regions being transformed into explorable destinations and in the rise of independent tourism, a form of tourism sometimes specifically framed in terms of adventure and exploration. There is no simple, spatial correspondence between explorable places (see Chapter Three) and independent tourism. Like the production of scenic spots, the production of explorable places is in part a strategic attempt to seize the economic (rather than ideological) opportunity presented by tourism. And like scenic spots, explorable places only partially fulfill the leisure desires of independent tourists. In the case of scenic spots, knowledge about places made for tourism is thought to be the domain of state cultural authority, transmitted through a unified, hegemonic narrative of cultural and national history. The primary actors in these acts
of transfer are tourism experts affiliated with the state package tourism system, and the primary acts are the written and verbal expression of master cultural narratives, a kind of “visual centralism” (Nyíri 2005, 72, 81). Nyíri describes a speech given by tour guide:

Our guide...adjusted the microphone to achieve an echo effect popular with karaoke singers and began a rapid, schoolteacher-like staccato narrative in a formal register that was to continue through much of the ride, with frequent repetitions (2005, 32).

The acts of transfer involved in the package tourism model, from guidebook writing, to tour guide scripts, to cultural performances, have been interpreted as conveying expert propositional knowledge about China’s cultural and national history. The acts of transfer implicit in independent tourism, by contrast, more prominently involve practical knowledge, a knowledge of how to organize and accomplish travel on one’s own. Put simply, independent tourism is impossible without practical geographic knowledge. In driving or taking regional buses across the Tibetan highlands of Sichuan, visitors to Yading are not simply another uncritical group of tourists on the business end of a bullhorn. The textual and representational knowledge about Yading – the kind we see on the maps and interpretive signage along the trail – is secondarily important to the practical knowledge they’ve employed to get there, to get around, and get back safely. And this knowledge feeds into further travel, that of tourists themselves, their friends and family, and “Internet friends” (wangyou, 网友) online.

Knowing enframed

I repeated the walk from Longtongba to the Chonggu Grassland many times during my visits to Yading, usually with tourists for all or part of the day. I took one of these walks with Yinghua, a woman from Shanghai in her early thirties who happened to be traveling solo. We
had met in circumstances similar to when I met Zhou Liang, both of us on our way to Yading, our travel plans overlapping for a few days. Yinhua had worked for foreign multinational companies doing field sales, work she was good at but that she didn’t enjoy. She had in the previous years developed an intense interest in travel, and had traveled the entire bumpy distance from Chengdu to Yading overland.

Yinhua and I set out from Longtongba late one morning, making our way upstream along the river and the mani stones. That day in mid-May saw only about a hundred people in the park, which meant that the trail was relatively quiet, and that the Chonggu Grassland was fairly empty of tourists. After walking over the last rise, the valley unfolding, the trail ended at the boardwalk that ran along the edges of the valley, encircling deep, braided channels, and widening into platforms where tourists would gather to take photographs. A sign read:

[A] long time ago, there [was] a glacier dammed lake. When the lake at the foot of Xiannairi Mountain burst [its] banks [it] also burst this glacier dammed lake. At last the... lake became today’s grassland...

A stupa marked the ancient confluence, one valley leading to our west, past the Chonggu Monastery, the other leading to the south. A wide slab of poured concrete supported a rudimentary tourist center, little more than a few service buildings, a pavilion with bleacher-style benches, a row of toilets in a terrible state, and a single hot water boiler where tourists could fill thermoses or paper bowls of instant noodles. While some tourists arrived here and took their time wandering farther on along the boardwalks, most lined up for the shuttle bus that makes a one-day visit to Yading possible.

We found no one waiting for the “electric cart,” as it was called. We walked directly to gasoline-powered 13-person cart that would carry us about six miles farther up the main valley
over a concrete road that followed the old pilgrimage path. There actually once had been
electric carts in service. The smashed carts I found hidden still had batteries in them, though
when I heard the gasoline engines groan through uphill turns I imagined the electric carts
couldn’t keep up with the demands of the terrain and the nonstop schedule of a tourism rush.

The ride usually meant a chill, even on sunny days, though tourists bracing against the
wind would vigilantly take photographs from the moving vehicle. We sped past more sights
marked with signs, past the rock formations labeled the Eighteen Disciples of the Buddha, the
gap in a cliff face called the Holy Water Door. The sacred geography was reduced to fleeting
points of interest. The ride ended at the Luorong Pasture, a wide valley sitting at 13,700 feet at
the center of Yading’s three mountain peaks. Park staff pointed us forward, down a few wooden
steps onto another boardwalk and past a sign listing rules of behavior for tourists. Along the
boardwalk, another sign read “Grasslands are the lungs of the plateau. Please care for them.”
Farther on, yet another explained:

The topography around the pasture [was] formed by [a] glacier. People grazed here before,
but now the pasture is [an] ecology preserve and [it’s not permitted] to graze. It’s said, a
long time ago, there was a boy who ardently loved to graze. His name was Luorong. He
always helped other people...graze and never needed...pay. After many years, people forgot
the pasture’s name and used this boy’s name... In 1928, Joseph Rock encamped here, when
he visited Yading.

Indeed, standing on the shoulder of the valley opposite the road were a few huts where
Joseph Rock supposedly stayed on his now famous visit in 1928 (see Chapter Five). They looked
almost like potato cellars, dug halfway into the ground, with short, stout walls of stone or log.
The old huts – the same ones standing when I visited the reserve a decade earlier – were in the
process of being demolished, with new huts and service buildings being built to better support the tourist services needed. Towering over the road behind us was Chanadordje (Xianuoduoji), which, the sign said:

means “Vajrapani Bodhisattva,” it is the east peak of the three snow-capped mountains and the elevation is 5958 meters. In Buddhism, he is [the bodhisattva] who gets rid of bullies and brings peace to good people. He is robust and vigorous, takes a tiger’s [skin] and an evil constrictor [around] his waist. Joseph Rock (an American missionary) describes this mountain as “Xianuoduoji is a bat that waits for flying; he is the embodiment of the thunder God in the ancient Greek mythology.”

Missing entirely from these signs – and from the entire experience of the reserve for most visitors – is the sacred geography that has made this place an important pilgrimage site. The Tibetan names don’t register, and despite Joseph Rock’s use of transliterated Tibetan in his article, this mountain scenery is placed in a Chinese territorial geography, while the names for the living land – the bodies of these bodhisattvas (Stutchbury 1999) – are effaced. Instead, we keep hearing of Rock. Farther along the walkway we came to a viewing platform that put us square with the head of the valley and Jambeyang (Yangmaiyong):

Yangmaiyong, in Tibetan, means “Manjusri Bodhisattva,” it is the south peak of the three snow-capped mountains and the elevation is 5958 meters. Manjusri Bodhisattva, in Buddhism, is the embodiment of wisdom. The peak [is like] the wisdom sword which Manjusri Bodhisattva holds in his hand straight toward the sky. This pure and noble mountain [stands] between earth and sky. In 1928, when Joseph Rock left Yunnan [for] Daocheng, he saw...Yangmaiyong...in the long distance and was overwhelmed by its sanctity and nobility. The he wrote in his diary: “Yangmaiyong is the most beautiful peak that I have seen.”
While tourist eyes and cameras were aimed at the mountain scenery, most bodies were in constant motion. The horse rides and the shuttle bus ride together cut hours of walking down to one, though tourists still spent much of the time ambling along the boardwalks and sometimes scattering off trail. For those who arrived at Luorong Pasture early enough, it was possible to book another horse ride to Milk Lake and Five-Color Lake, the highest elevation that most tourists reach in the park at nearly 15,000 feet. Only a few horses made the trip, partly because of the limited resources available so far into the scenic area, but more so because the trail was a long, strenuous climb, and two or three round trips were usually all the guides and their horses could manage in a day. There was no infrastructure above the Luorong Pasture, and unlike the lower elevations, little had changed in the decade since my first visit. The boardwalk ended at Joseph Rock’s hut camp, and from there the tourist trail was the same as the pilgrimage route that local, able Tibetans walk at least once a year.

Zhou Liang, his friends, and I hiked to the high lakes on our visit, but because of the rainfall, the trail was in even worse shape than the Mani Corridor. Because of our late start, Yinhua and I decided it was too late in the day to push on. We stopped to warm up inside one of the old huts, which was being used as staff quarters. Yinhua sat on a wooden stool near a rudimentary table of sheet metal and extruded steel welded into a frame for an electric heating element. With the warmth and the occasional popping of electrical arcs from the element’s loose connection, the stove served as a surrogate campfire. A group of six young art students were gathered around it, busy shooting pictures of one of the Tibetan guides: “What character!” “Couldn’t be more handsome!”

Yinhua sat to the side, speaking with a tour guide from Lijiang who introduced himself as Li Gen (“My name is the same as an American president from the 1980s”). Reagan was guiding an FIT tour of seven people from Guangdong on an overland drive from Lijiang to
Lhasa. They talked about traveling in Yunnan, about how the road to Meili was open only a
couple times a week. Yinghua was not on a schedule or a set itinerary and getting information
like this had become an essential part of how she traveled. The men who had been splitting
firewood came in for a late lunch. Cabbage went into the wok and sizzled under the bare light
bulb. Yinghua sat to the side eating a bowl of instant noodles. Short of dipping into a laborer’s
lunch, hot water was the only warm food available once a tourist passed Longtongba.

We started our trip back down the valley as the cloud cover broke over the peaks. The
boardwalk lead us to the half-built tourist station where we waited for the shuttle with part of a
tour group. Instead of the usual fur-collared military surplus coats that have kept China’s
mountain-visiting tourists warm for decades, these were (fake) Adidas-branded coats with 具
德勒 – tashi delek – embroidered on the breast. The early return left us time to visit the
Chonggu Monastery and continue up the valley beyond to Drolma Lake at the foot of Shenrezig
(Xiannairi). Along the way a sign told us:

Xiannairi, in Tibetan, means “Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva,” it is the north peak of the three
snow-capped mountains and the highest mountain in Daocheng county. The elevation is
6032 meters... The right peak which [looks like a] pyramid is White Tara, [and to the] left
are Green Tara, Jiangxiang Tara and Miaoyin (a great sound) fairy. It’s said they are playing
[a heavenly] sound. When the sinners in the hell’s valley behind the Xiannairi hear this...
sound, they will be repentant and [be free] from misery.

At Drolma Lake, a group of men were chattering about a yak wading the edges of the lake.
Grazing was banned when the nature reserve was established, so it must have wandered in on
its own. We sat with other tourists on the viewing platform. Nearly everyone was busy taking
photographs and arranging one another for group pictures. A man stepped down from the
platform and swished a hand in the water. The sign at the water’s edge explained that the lake was holy, and shouldn’t be touched. An older sign – heavily weathered, crooked, shabby compared to the lacquered wooden signs that presented the Yading brand – stood behind him:

Travel and respect the religious traditions.

It was obvious even upon arrival at the main gate to Yading that the remote mountain valley has become known in a particular way, one recognizable to anyone that has visited nature parks elsewhere in China and unrecognizable to local Tibetan residents who had grown up there and grazed and gathered in its hills. A few tourists I spoke with during my time there expressed an interest in Tibetan religion and culture, though the majority were there simply for the scenery. Particularly after the October 2005 issue of Chinese National Geography listed Yading’s three sacred peaks as one of China’s five most beautiful mountain ranges, this was what Yading was most known for. More than being an important sacred site for Tibetans, and more than being a valuable biodiversity hotspot, Yading is beautiful. The official website for Yading called it “The world’s most beautiful place.”

The value of Yading to the nation as symbolic scenery – as Jiuzhaigou has also been, and as Yosemite has been to the United States – is apparent upon arrival in Daocheng, where photographs of the Yading scenic area are displayed on billboards, restaurant menus, and local business cards. Fundamental to the creation of this national scenery is a process of objectification and abstraction that Lefebvre would have recognized: The Yading tourist center includes a small “museum” about the park, with posters explaining scientific matters of geology and ecology, a scale model of the entire area (Figure 17), and plaques displaying the reserve’s national status as a star-rated tourist site and a UN Man and Biosphere site. The interpretive
signs and viewing platforms along the road to Yading Village continue framing the “objective”
view of the park, of a distant gaze and dispassionate facts, as if the scenic area itself were a
life-sized museum pinned down in time. This enframing continues when setting out from
Longtongba – every step of the journey, the way Yading as imagined by planners and as
apparent to the nation presents itself to visitors.

Figure 17: Yading Nature Reserve scenic area scale model (author photo).

Ann Anagnost observed that “one occasionally catches sight of the ways the nation
becomes the object of contemplation” (1997, 1), and in understanding how a national geo-body
can be produced through mapping is one way of uncovering this process. National narratives
are another powerful way the nation can come into being (Bhabha 1990, 1–2). What a national
geo-body and a national narrative share in common in China, as elsewhere, is their role in
enframing a national idea. The notion of enframing can be traced from Heidegger’s (1977a)
characterization of the modern era as the age of the world-picture, a time when the representation of the world through calculation, planning and ordering – a picture – is accepted as the reality, thereby closing off the possibility of other ways of understanding the world and the human place in it. Heidegger thought that a world enframed masks the very processes by which it is enframed (1977b). Foucault (1980) extended Heidegger’s notion of enframing to consider its political effects through the modern regime of truth effected through scientific discourse. Mitchell (1988) wrote of colonial modes of enframing that ordered colonized societies in ways that made them “like” the colonizers.

Fitzgerald’s idea of China as a nationless state (1995) implies the need for a perpetual state project of enframing, and the geographic discourse that enframes Yading as one of the “most beautiful places in China” can be seen as functioning in this way, especially in smoothing out the complex political realities of developing leisure space for Han tourists in Tibet. The presentation of “objective” facts about Yading – elevations, legends, references to Tibetan culture – serve to enframe the place not simply as decontextualized beauty, but as a beauty symbolic of China’s geo-body. What seems to be important about Yading above all is the authoritative knowledge about Yading: It has been argued that the place encountered in fragmented scenes is more important than the actual experience of it. This is one of the conclusions Nyíri made about scenic spots, that “the uniqueness of the site...does not have to come from the experience; it is enough simply to be told about it” (2005, 54). Assessed in this way, the uneventful, even unremarkable, walk that Yinghua and I had in the scenic area wouldn’t seem to add up to much: All we had done is what any tourist does, which is to move through the scenic area to gain different views. The concrete experience of the place could be dismissed as irrelevant to the question of Yading’s national importance. But I argue that it does
matter, because the enframing knowledge about Yading is inseparable from the knowledge about how to travel, move, and live in that place.

The difference between knowing about a place like Yading and knowing how to be in that place recalls the classic distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how made by Gilbert Ryle sixty years ago. Ryle sought to challenge the “prevailing doctrine” that human intelligence is constituted by internal acts of thinking, by “operations of considering propositions,” and that practical action can be “intelligent” only to the extent that it is thought – in other words, that “doing things is never an act of intelligence” (1945, 1). Ryle’s argument is that knowing how to do things or to perform skills cannot be defined or subsumed by knowing that something is the case, or knowing a set of factual propositions; these ways of knowing are distinct from one another (Ryle 1945, 4; Roland 1958, 380–81). To say that knowing-how and knowing-that are distinct, as Ryle did (1945, 15), is mainly to say “that neither can be resolved into the other and neither can be subsumed by the other...in their full distinctness, knowing how to and knowing that need one another” (Wiggins 2012, 108). This philosophical discussion is fundamental to the idea of acts of transfer, the inscribing and incorporating practices that Connerton argued constitute collective knowledge and memory. It echoes Connerton’s own words when he wrote, “Many practices of inscription contain an element of incorporation, and it may even be the case that no type of inscription at all is conceivable without such an irreducible component of incorporation” (1989, 78).

Whereas Ryle was concerned with kinds of knowledge, Connerton was concerned with kinds of knowledge practices. Connerton’s approach also emphasized the necessary relationship between the propositional and the practical: In emphasizing the importance of non-cognitive
incorporating practices to collective memory he was responding to a similar prevailing doctrine in social theory that tended to ignore the relevance of the body to shared, social knowledge.

These concerns – of thinking through the relationship between cognized thought and non-cognized practice – span more than a century, and were centrally important in the work of Bergson, Mauss, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu (see Thrift 2000, 36) and others (see Lorimer 2005, 80). One of the more recent articulations of these issues in geography has been in nonrepresentational theory (NRT) (see Lorimer 2005; Cresswell 2012), though NRT has been criticized for, among other things, remaining limited to a “layer-cake ontology,” for inverting the foundation of human knowledge from representation to practice, thereby prioritizing a practical over a propositional intentionality (Barnett 2008, 188). Ryle made the same conceptual move many decades earlier, and NRT may have failed to take hold widely (see Cresswell 2012) in part because it has employed a similar “vocabulary of ontological layers, levels, and priority” (Barnett 2008, 189).

One of the values of shifting the focus on place from what we mean by the idea to the knowledge practices that make place meaning possible is that it offers a way around the layer cake problem. We can recognize that practices of knowing-that and knowing-how are both fundamental to knowing, and in adopting these distinctions as a heuristic tool we can better recognize situations “in which one or the other aspect predominates” (Connerton 1989, 78–79). This approach helps constrain the tendency to privilege the inscribing practices fundamental to discourse and representation, and prevent an overcorrection that focuses too much on the incorporating practices of embodied, practical knowledge. In other words, this approach echoes Lefebvre’s interest in the spatial body, and in retaining a dialectical understanding of abstract and lived place. Two contrasting concrete examples may help illustrate this mutual dependence. On one hand, our practical knowledge depends on propositional knowledge:
...we may be unable to exercise practical knowledge without some relevant piece of propositional knowledge – for example, where the fuse box is located. More interestingly, the improvement of practice often waits upon technological/scientific/theoretical discovery. Think of dentistry or surgery. (Wiggins 2012, 108–09)

On the other hand, our propositional knowledge depends on practical knowledge:

A ship’s pilot who is retained by the maritime authorities to bring large ships safely to anchor in an awkward or difficult harbour can tell us, on the basis of his competence and experience, that when the wind is from the north and the tide is running out, the best thing to do is to steer straight for such-and-such a church tower until one is well past a certain bend in the channel. Almost anyone can come to possess that propositional knowledge but the information they get in this way will probably rest indispensably upon the experience and practical knowledge of a handful of people... (ibid., 109)

Instead of trying to invert the layers and promote independent tourism as a new paradigm of practical knowledge in China, my more modest aim is to demonstrate how the propositional and practical knowledge of place can be handled in tension with one another to help get at a political aspect of tourism in China that may otherwise remain unarticulated. The package tourism system and the scenic spot model employ a particular kind of expert knowledge and depend on knowledge practices that we could call the prevailing doctrine of cognized, calculative, and representational practices. The practical knowledge incorporated through the skillful meeting of needs in place generates a different kind of knowledge than the planning and the production of place. This knowledge is not better or more true, though for Chinese traveling to unconventional destinations outside the city, it is certainly more useful, and therefore
valuable. The experiences that generate this kind of knowledge – those of exploring place – have become more forceful.

Most tourists visiting Yading do not arrive in guided tour groups, and no guide service yet exists in the park. I rarely noticed a tourist referring to a guidebook inside the scenic area. Despite the interpretive signage in the park, I saw few people read them. While I inserted these signs into the account of Yinghua’s day in Yading, she paid no attention to them. On the few times I stopped in the main tourist center, tourists simply bought their tickets and left without looking at the park model or the scientific explanations. Unless they had done research about the place in advance – on top of reading travel journals and strategies on how to make the trip – tourists had to make due with the fairly minimal amount of information available during their visit. But even that didn’t seem to matter much. In my interviews with Zhou Liang about a year after our walk in Yading, he couldn’t remember any of the major place names, though he admitted he wasn’t really that interested in the first place: The trip had been more important to relax and have fun. What was more important for the independent tourists I spoke with was knowledge related to the journey itself, rather than getting to “know” names, facts and stories about the place. The enframing of Yading as scenery was powerful, but not total.

Knowing implaced

“It’s kind of funny,” Yinghua said when I asked her why she’d decided to go to Xinjiang, the destination of her first independent trip in 2007. “I like singing, and I saw a music video of this Hong Kong singer that was shot in Xinjiang. It was the first time I’d seen it and I was fascinated. I watched it all the time. I thought the scenery was really stunning, and it just made me want to go more and more.” Powerful scenery.

We met in Shanghai about a year after our walk in Yading. As I had with Zhou Liang and a
few other tourists, I wanted to connect the experience I observed in Yading with a broader life context. I was asking about her earlier travel experiences and we had begun talking about one of her most influential trips.

In 2006 Yinghua’s father died after an illness. Through that experience, and after years of high-pressure corporate sales, she found herself exhausted and in need of a break. “I bore it all patiently,” she said, “and some success came from of the work. Suddenly in the middle of it all I was very eager to get away. I didn’t want to go on living like that.” By the end of the year she had submitted her resignation, and began to plan a trip.

“When I was working I would usually use personal vacation days, weekends, and longer holidays to travel – never on a tour group. This was my first independent trip in a real sense, of going to a place with no time limits. Before then, my trips were for the most part set in advance: when to go, when to come back. It was all like that. But the time constraints before were nothing like my travels after that. It was a significant change.”

“I figured out where it was,” she said, referring to the music video. “Kanas Lake National Park. At exactly the right time I found a destination. I was very excited. I looked online for a lot of information – I probably spent a few days’ time looking at what other people wrote in their travelogues [youji, 游记]. Even though Xinjiang is big I had big eyes: I wanted to travel the entire border.”

“I looked online for a few people to travel with so we could all go in on hiring a car for the trip. It’s rare that my friends and colleagues would be free at the same time and I couldn’t find anyone for this trip. So I posted a notice on CTrip’s ‘Travel Companion’ site saying where I wanted to go and that I was looking for people available the same time.” She knew that would be the only way they could cover a lot of ground in such a large area, and that it would spread the cost around. She found three people.
“We chatted a lot on MSN and Ctrip. I sent them my plans as we talked it over. It was my first trip, so I did a lot of work. I remember clearly using Ctrip to look at other people’s travel journals and strategies. It was all on the Internet. I could have bought books about places, but there’s not much to most of the ‘China Here and There’ kind of books. I’ve flipped through them and the places they recommend. They’re all the popular places, nothing special or interesting. Though the names of the books are different, the places they recommend are all about the same. Like the guides on Yunnan: they all recommend Feilaisi and Jade Dragon Snow Mountain.”

“I found after my trip that none of this was as good as talking with local people. Locals can tell you a lot about places, and they know the most, the things books are unlikely to cover. And books are published at a certain time, while places can change a lot in a year or even six months. On the websites I looked at, the material was all from the current year, the same year I wanted to go. It’s much more useful to hear from someone who just got back from some place, who knows the situation. If you looked at a recommendation of a guesthouse, you can’t find its strengths or weaknesses. They won’t write that straightforwardly. I think these books are aimed less at giving tourists specialized information than they are just to sell, just thrown-together parts from here and there and set out there to sell. Plus they’re just too heavy, not convenient at all to travel with.”

She was especially careful that first trip, sometimes calling ahead to places she was going to get more information, especially in booking nights at guesthouses. In September she met her companions in Urumqi – one from Beijing, one from Wuhu, and one from Fujian – and flew to Kashgar. “One girl had taken a long leave from work, even using up all of her New Year holiday time. Another was in the army, I think, just using vacation time. I don’t remember much about the third.” They made their way back by train and hired car, traveling for a month. And they made it to Kanas Lake: “It wasn’t even close to the music video. They’d shot scenery from all
over the place, here and there, and put it all together. There were tons of people there. The scenery was beautiful, but nothing like what I had in mind – no people, no utopian [shiwai taoyuan, 世外桃源] feeling, or romantic atmosphere – not even a tiny bit of that. It was all just tour groups following little flags.” The enframing that had inspired her trip was not total and apart once she’d actually been there.

Yinghua’s preparations and travel experiences leading up to her trip to Yading required both propositional and practical knowledge. They drew not only on her abilities to choose a place, gather information, and envision travel in advance, but it was also deeply affected by her past experience, her knowledge of what it is like to travel in Xinjiang and other parts of western China. The practical knowledge gained through her previous trips informed what kind of propositional knowledge she found important for her next trip. And the presence of both knowing-that and knowing-how were how she prepared for and became comfortable with traveling on her own.

Underlying the idea that practical knowledge gained through incorporating practices is important to knowing place is the idea that the body is the central organizing agent in place knowledge (Casey 2000, 149). This is as true in the case of a physical orientation in a specific place as it is in the awareness and felt connection between places, of the ability to put oneself in another place. The body is central to the ordering of propositional knowledge about place because its platial experience provides a continuity for further experiences. However, a focus on the body cannot be limited to the individual, corporeal body, because the body in isolation does not generate social effects (see Law 1994, 3; Franklin 2003, 98). The social, spatial body spreads beyond its own skin, extending into the world and drawing into itself the world of propositional
knowledge, inscription, and calculation. Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, Casey, and Connerton have all expressed how the body should be seen as a world-organizing agent. Mauss, for example, saw the skill and knowledge of the body as fundamental to the social habitus, “the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason” (1973, 73).

The tourist experience can never be circumscribed by strategies of enframing because the tourist experience is always already an “implaced” (Casey 2000, 213–15) experience. It is embedded in the ways we as humans dwell in and through place (Heidegger 1993; see Elden 2001). Implacement refers to already being in place. At times we may feel out-of-place, or that we are in a “non-place” (Augé 1995), or that we are in a home place (Veijola 2006), yet no matter what, our narrations are possible only by the fact of our implacement. Because our implacement defies complete ordering through external technologies, our stories in place and about places never end. Massey (1992) recognized that attachment to place is inevitable, and develops her idea of a progressive sense of place by arguing that places do not have to be static, bounded, and unified. In differentiating between place as enframed and place as lived – that is, implaced – the tensions inherent in spatial practice are made clear. For Zhou and Yinghua – for me – the feel of the trail underfoot, the smell of incense, manure, or ozone from an arriving storm, the sounds of running water or the crack of an avalanche, the sense of exertion in thinner air, the heightened awareness of bodily needs for water, food, warmth, and shelter, brought Yading intimately close for a time, as places often do once the distancing routines and comforts of everyday life are given up for the immediate presence of place brought by travel. And in the midst of our implacement, at least momentarily, gaps opened in the enframing of Yading as national scenery.

The political implications of bodily implacement are not self-evident, and further clarification is necessary to work through how enframing and implacement converge on the spatial practice of the body. We can, on one hand, think of the body as a biopolitical target
inscribed by social law, morality, and values as object enframed, and on the other hand as a lived, corporeal and sexually specific experience (Grosz 1995, 33). Another way of expressing this is, on one hand, as a body “acted upon, as socially and historically constructed and inscribed from the outside,” and on the other an active body, “the body as lived and generative” (Simonsen 2005, 10). A body known is one targeted for management and governance, one in itself disciplined (Foucault 1995, 135–169), and regulated as a part of a population (Foucault 1988, 135–159). The notion of the body as a target can include the targeting of a laboring body formed under and in contestation with capitalism (Harvey 2000; Harvey 1998). This is a discussion beyond the scope of this dissertation, though for now I simply want to emphasize that the body in these approaches is thought through social and political externalities. A knowing body on the other hand is one that is lived. We can think of the knowledge practices involved here as the interaction of inscribing and incorporating practices, the interaction of a rationalizing, abstracting technology with a concrete, lived reality. Rather than thinking the body through the social, this approach conceptualizes the social through the body, of how the internal architecture of a body creates and sustains a social order.

Elizabeth Grosz suggested that while these two approaches may be incompatible they converge nonetheless upon the real body, which can be seen as the point of articulation between the body targeted and the body lived. Grosz suggested thinking of the body as a hinge between “a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body’s outer surface” (1995, 33). I want to suggest a way of thinking through this articulation that echoes the approach already taken towards place. Like our understanding of place, our understanding of the body rests on the practices employed in knowing it. We can think of a known body as targeted by a governing technology or a political economic system. We can also think of a knowing body as lived and oriented to the
world. The body is simultaneously target of attempts at ordering and is always actively ordering its own world. Both processes are drawn into one another. The body as both targeted and lived is a body in practice: “If somebody ‘carries’ (and ‘carries out’) a practice, he or she must take over both the bodily and the mental patterns that constitute the practice” (Reckwitz 2002, 252). The body is always simultaneously both targeted and lived, known and knowing. As the point of articulation between these conceptual approaches, the knowledge of the body and knowing through the body is fundamental. Just as the spatial body is targeted by knowledge practices that define, discipline, and regulate it, the body is engaged in its own knowledge practices.

Ian Hacking’s work suggests one way of understanding the spatial body as a point of articulation. Modeled on Foucault’s focus on knowledge in the disciplines (an “anatomo-politics of the body”) and in regulatory controls (a “bio-politics of the population”) (Foucault 1988, 139), Hacking proposed that the power over the biological existence of a population (Foucault 1988, 137) has also required the knowledge of memory, a “memoro-politics” of the self, the subject, or what Hacking prefers to call the soul (1996, 71–72). Hacking suggests that power works through the physiological target of the body, the statistical target of the population, and the neurological and psychological target of memory. Because there could be no science of “the soul,” the science of memory served “as the public forum for something of which science could not openly speak” (ibid., 79). The politics of memory is a politics of remembering and forgetting, a politics that takes many forms, from the role of habits and routines in the life of individuals or the commemorations of a society, to the explanatory power of pain or trauma in understanding why people or nations behave as they do. Hacking’s interest in the politics of memory highlights the fact that practices of knowing and memory are as integral to politics and governance as discipline and regulation. And the body itself generates and carries knowledge.

Connerton’s work complements Hacking’s, and suggests a second point of articulation,
the other “side” of the hinge. Connerton argued that routinized bodily practices are an important site of memory. His distinction between inscribing (cognitive, representational) and incorporating (non-cognitive, non-representational) practices was his basis for theorizing the relationship of body and knowledge. Connerton and Hacking each focused on collective memory, and in each the role of the body in social knowing is essential. What we know about a place is not simply what others tell, write, or photograph, but a part of one’s own life, shared with others; place is collective memory and collective knowledge. The practice of travel can be seen in this way, as not separated from everyday life at home, but as the extension of orienting actions into new environments, actions that help situate oneself in a new place. And like all experience (see Dewey 1997), it becomes a way of staying oriented: “the operation of habitual body memory consists in its being a reactivatable link between situations that call for consistent behavior.” Traveling becomes a way of developing a sufficient familiarity with places and regions to be free from the work of constant reorientation.

The notion of the body as a hinge between enframing and implacement, between a body known and a knowing body, serves as an elaboration of Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial body and balances the tendency to see the actions of Chinese tourists through one extreme or the other, as either an uncritical population coopted by and complicit in the state’s territorial project, or as a grassroots movement of free-thinking individuals standing up and possibly subverting the territorial goals the state pursues through tourism. I’ll return to these questions in Chapter Six, though for the moment want to summarize simply by pointing out the disjunctions in the tourist experience of Yading, that for all the enframing of the reserve as a national-level site of beauty, biodiversity, and ethnic diversity, the actual experience of real bodies in Yading generates an incorporated knowledge that may confirm or contradict the knowledge inscribed.
*The place of knowledge*

“Xinjiang was first,” Yinhua said. There was a large part of China she still wanted to see, and she wanted to do it on her own terms. After traveling in Xinjiang, she had enough experience to know that she could pull off a trip on her own, and that she could be free from the negotiations and compromises of traveling in a group.

“When I got back to Shanghai [in October 2007] it wasn’t long before I was off again. I thought of going to Yunnan, and I decided to first go to western Sichuan.” I asked her what she had in mind when she made the choice. “I’d looked at a lot of travel strategies online. Before that my concept of Sichuan was Chengdu and Jiuzhaigou; I had no idea Sichuan also included Ganzi and Aba Prefectures.” After researching more online, she decided that was where she would go, and left for Chengdu with a rough idea of traveling the province’s Tibetan areas.

She had heard of Songpan, a town with hiking and horse trekking long popular with foreigners, through a foreign guidebook. Somewhat unimpressed, she realized how close she already was to Jiuzhaigou and made a detour to the park. “Because I was on my own I had no time limits, I could do what I wanted,” she said, “I felt very free.” Like Zhang and Kou, she stayed a night inside the park and she became interested in an undeveloped part of the protected area, attempting to hike in herself but realizing she wasn’t really prepared for a trip into the mountains on her own.

She headed west from Jiuzhaigou along the route she’d planned, stopping at the Four Sisters mountain on her way to Danba, an area of picturesque hillside villages. From there she’d orginally planned on turning south and heading for Yading, which she’d known about for years from magazines and the Internet. But her plans began to change as she learned more about Ganzi Prefecture.
She stayed for many days in a guesthouse in Danba – spending only a few dollars a night – and began talking with the manager’s wife and her local friends about the area. They told her about the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy in Serta, a place she’d never heard of or come across in the travel strategies she’d found online. She got online right away and found it as impressive as they’d said. Based on the local recommendations and some Internet research, she abandoned her planned itinerary and headed for Serta. While she’d found a lot of information online about Yading from other travelers, there was almost nothing about Larung Gar, one of Tibet’s largest and most important intellectual centers. She left most of her luggage in Danba. There was no direct transportation to Serta and she had to patch together local transportation to make her way.

“When I arrived I was shocked. It was as if I’d entered a different space [gekong, 隔空]. The hillside was covered with red buildings and everyone was wearing red robes and shaved heads. The temple interior was breathtaking, as if I’d passed into another world, another place.”

She stayed a few days and sat in a few classes held in Chinese. She remembered the curtain pulled between the male and female students, and the story she heard later about why: A lama and a nun had started seeing each other, an event significant enough in the academy to warrant new rules. Thinking back on all this, Yinghua said, “If you stay on the conventional routes, even if you look at other people’s travel strategies, you wouldn’t go to that kind of place or hear those kinds of stories.”

Yinghua had left Shanghai planning to travel a route that closely matched what the Ganzi Prefecture government promoted (see Chapter Three). But along the way, once familiar with the routines of traveling in “unknown” parts of China, she was free to change her itinerary as she desired. On her way back she sought out a “living Buddha” (huofo, 活佛; a tulku, or, reincarnate lama) who ran a primary school where she volunteered teaching and spending time with the
students. She was by her own account naïve, though she also recognized the value of having that experience, which had drawn her close enough to that part of Ganzi that she returned there on her own in 2010, even after the Tibetan protests and crackdown following the March 2008 riots in Lhasa. She said she never felt concerned for her safety and she seemed almost nonchalant about traveling Sichuan’s long, rough roads. She knew her mother probably wouldn’t have felt the same way, and despite regular evening phone calls Yinghua never told her exactly where she was. While one generation traveled China’s borderlands the other remained at home unaware.

We were sitting a world away from these events – it was years later, and Yinghua and I were talking in a busy cafe in Shanghai. Toward the end of the interview, I asked Yinghua how she felt her life was different after these trips. She began a long, thoughtful answer that encapsulated for me the ways that domestic tourism for Chinese can be a way of creating a place of one’s own, a way of drawing the world into oneself not only by thinking it but by living it. Her story is not representative of Chinese – she was conscious of that herself. And there is little here that can teach us about what “Chinese” think about travel or Tibet. However, Yinghua’s story does help underscore the ways that exploring place can be individually transformative, that the process of identifying a place to travel to, researching and preparing for that journey, leaving home and traveling, and returning can be the basis for an experience that calls the dominant ordering of society into question. At the least it serves as a warning against framing tourism in China simply as a population bound to traditional culture and a state development project successful in homogenizing tourist subjectivities.

“Travel was a way of broadening my view of the world,” Yinghua said. “Early on, our ideas
were not our own – possibly they were from how we were educated as children, or from our parents’ lessons. It’s very easy to be influenced like that by your parents – perhaps it’s the biggest influence. Whatever education you have you get a fixed way of thinking. If I didn’t travel, I’d still think I should first work, then earn money, then marry, and so on. I wouldn’t think of anything else; it would be the only thing I wanted to do in life. I think most people think this way. Many people don’t even know what they want.”

“I think the difficult things in life are really a way of figuring out what you want to do. In other words, in my life I probably have things I want to do that come from my heart, things I want to accomplish. It doesn’t have to have some big meaning, but it’s just something I want to do in my life that would make it richer, that I could die satisfied. Looking back on my life I could remember I did this thing and that thing, that I had no regrets, that I’d done enough, that it was pretty good.”

The doing of tourism became more important for Yinghua than finding some kind of specific meaning in it, or simply ticking off the places she’d seen in the images, movies, and texts that had inspired her trips. These things fell away upon discovery (and perhaps disappointment) that they didn’t exist as they had appeared. The abstracted places and propositional knowledge that went into the trip gave way to the lived experience of travel and the bodily knowledge gained in place.

For Lefebvre, the body was not a metaphor or site of discourse, but an integral part of the production of space. He saw on one hand how the body was fragmented and broken through processes of visualization and abstraction, even at the hands of Western philosophy, which has “betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body” (Lefebvre 1991, 407; emphasis in original). However, Lefebvre also saw the body as the site of political possibility (Simonsen 2005, 2). Running throughout Lefebvre’s
critique of abstract space is the fact of the decorporealization of space, of shifting from the “space of the body to the body-in-space” (Lefebvre 1991, 302). This process is driven by:

a logic of visualization and one of metaphorization; living bodies, the bodies of ‘users’ are caught up, not only in the toils of parcellized space, but also in the work of images, signs and symbols. (Simonsen 2005, 2)

Like Harvey, who was critical of places produced for leisure and tourism (see Chapter Three), Lefebvre found little to love in the placemaking projects that encourage leisure. He wrote,

Once a conquest of the working class, in the shape of paid days off, holidays, weekends, and so on, leisure has been transformed into an industry, into a victory of neocapitalism and an extension of bourgeois hegemony to the whole of space. As an extension of dominated space, leisure spaces are arranged at once functionally and hierarchically. They serve the reproduction of production relations (Lefebvre 1991, 383–384).

However, unlike Harvey, Lefebvre’s critique of place production does not end here, for he sees in leisure and tourism practices something more than commodity fetishism and capital accumulation:

At the same time, the body takes its revenge – or at least calls for revenge. It seeks to make itself known – to gain recognition – as generative... The body tends to behave as a differential field...as a total body, breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell developed in response to labour, to the division of labour, to the localizing of work and the specialization of places. (ibid., 384)

What Lefebvre saw in leisure practices was an opportunity to reconstruct the fragmented body. Lefebvre saw leisure spaces as contradictory spaces, “where the existing mode of
production produces both its worst and its best – parasitic outgrowths on the one hand and exuberant new branches on the other – as prodigal of monstrosities as of promises (that it cannot keep)” (ibid., 385). Critiques such as Boyer’s (1996; see also Chapter Three) provide accounts of the monstrosities of place production. But where do we look to find those exuberant branches, the opportunities for the body to take its revenge, so to speak, and to generate what Lefebvre called a space of its own? The spatial body offers us a way to understand how a politics of capital accumulation and biopolitical control exists in tension with a politics of individual life and collective experience.

In this dissertation, the spatial body is the point of departure from the idea that tourism in China is a matter of homogenized package tourism, state authority, and representation, or that we can expect from tourists an explicitly critical, perhaps even subversive stance toward the state project. The body is not simply a docile participant in a calculable, visible tourism world, but pursues its own desires and needs through its own creative acts. It is this “real” body that serves as the destination for an approach to tourism in China that addresses real tourists in real places (see Minca and Oakes 2011). Exploring place is intended as a way of employing Lefebvre’s notion of spatial practice of a real body in thinking through the interdependence of placemaking and “platial” practice (Casey 1997, 314) in China.

Exploring place cannot be bifurcated into “phenomenological” or “historical-materialist” practices, nor tied to specific kinds of places. It is rather an idea intended to retain the dialectical edge of Lefebvre’s approach, with the implicit tension between the ways that our exploring is shaped by calculations and plans, and the ways we continue to create our own spaces, whether we recognize, resist, or play with the dominant spatial order. This aspect of
Lefebvre’s work as been recovered in recent years as the influence of major interpreters of
Lefebvre, such as Harvey and Soja, has been recast (see Schmid 2008; Merrifield 2006). The
concept of exploring place aims to put Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial body at the center of a
discussion of place, a move that approaches the internal dialectical tensions of place as valuable
rather than as a problem to resolve. Centrally important is the interrelationship of place and the
body in geographic knowing, as a bridge or hinge between the propositional and the practical,
and the basis for a platial politics (Elden 2001, 37).

Because the spatial body is generative of its own place, and by its nature a kind of place
that is distinct from those produced through abstraction and calculation, place is implicitly
political. Harvey’s and Boyer’s critiques of place production (see Chapter Three) are powerful
and, from a certain perspective, undeniable: The power of capitalism to transform place is clear.
However, in dismissing the possibility that place can be known through noncognitive,
pre-theoretical bodily practices, Harvey dismissed political possibilities regarding place that
Lefebvre remained open to.

Exploring place has become a routine in China, a repeating practice that sustains
knowledge of the national geo-body through knowing the nation’s places. Exploring place as a
learned practice has developed along two trajectories, one biographical, a skill learned over time
by individual tourists, and one social, a skill learned over time by a nation coming to know itself
in new ways. And the skills gained and applied by independent tourists are geared to
discovering new places, planning and preparing travel, carrying out a trip, and returning home
with a new experience. Exploring place is about acquiring expertise in how to know the nation.
The knowledge of how to explore the nation is sedimented in bodily practices and learned over
time through encounters in place.

One of the important questions in tourism studies is how tourist landscapes and places
built for tourism order the power we live by (Jokinen and Veijola 2003). Another aspect of the same question is how tourists themselves, through their own generative making of their own place, order and disorder that power (see Oakes 2011). The body is no more important to the independent tourist experience than any other experience. But in independent tourism we can see how bodily practices have taken on a new political role in what kind of geographic knowledge about China’s places, regions, and the nation itself are produced. Yinghua’s experience – the progression of new travel skills, experiences, and desires learned over many years – is indicative of the knowledge practices at work in China. These knowledge practices are employed by a social group that previously didn’t exist, and that did not have a political role in knowledge production. The knowledge at stake is not so much the knowledge that the CCP established its legitimacy through – of a continuous cultural history, of a people victimized by colonialism and feudalism, of an intact national territory passed from government to government – but rather a new kind of national knowledge that has taken root within and surrounding that founding story. As Chinese have taken to independent travel, new practices have generated knowledge about places and regions that have had powerful ordering effects on the knowledge of China as a geo-body.

Place is made through placemaking projects, though it is also made through the lived encounter in the world. An approach to place that encompasses both its production and its life exposes how these “differences” are related, and that just as few of us are untouched by the production of space in the current global capitalistic system, so too are processes of placemaking that creates rationalized “spaces” touched by the embodied practices and bodily knowledge of places we produce through living.
A routine discovery

Should any outsider now venture into Konka land he would be robbed and then slain.

– Joseph Rock, 1931\textsuperscript{56}

Here is the idealized heaven city dwellers seek, the last pure land on the blue earth.

– Yading Nature Reserve promotional video, c.2004\textsuperscript{57}

When I first visited Yading in 1999, I was neither robbed nor slain. On the contrary, when setting out from the trailhead a man helped me into the saddle of his horse and placed his young child in front of me to hold until we arrived at his home, where he would deliver her before guiding me toward the sacred peaks of the Konka Risumgongba. In 1931, the American botanist Joseph Rock described this terrain as the domain of outlaw lamas and bandit pilgrims. Today, it is the centerpiece of the Yading Nature Reserve (Yading Ziran Baohuqu, 亚丁自然保护区), a national reserve that has become a popular tourism destination. Yading remains a place of

\textsuperscript{56}Rock 1931, 14
\textsuperscript{57}DXRG c.2004
religious significance for local Tibetan residents and pilgrims, who annually circumambulate its mountain peaks. And since the mid-1990s, it has become a place of national significance, a place that has embodied the desires of a newly mobile nation in search of leisure.

Joseph Rock was by his own account the first foreigner to visit the Konka Risumongba, a mountain range in southwestern Sichuan Province close to the border with Yunnan.\(^5\) He called the area an unknown land, a claim that helped cultivate a new professional identity. Rock had come to consider himself an explorer and geographer; his lifelong work collecting botanical and zoological specimens was a side-interest on this trip, while photography took on a central role. Rock wrote of the Konka Risumongba, “...it is to the credit of [the National Geographic Society] that this terra incognita has become geographically known and its unsurpassed scenery pictured not only in black and white, but also in natural-color photographs” (1931, 4). Over the past twenty years, these photographs and the story of their making have been woven into the cultural history of Yading. Rock’s legacy has been retained not only in the ways his writings and photographs have been utilized as a resource for tourism development, but in the ways his discovery of Yading is repeated through routines of tourism in the reserve.

Each fall, after a steady increase in tourism over the summer, Yading is crowded with tens of thousands of visitors, mostly Han from cities across the country. During my visits to the park, many tourists arrived with a camera and the desire to view the scenery (kan fengjing, 看风景). While a few tourists I spoke with expressed a specific interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and many commented positively on learning something about Tibetans, nearly everyone mentioned the scenery. For many it seemed Tibet was a depoliticized scenic experience, a matter I’ll take up in

\(^5\) The area is known in Tibetan as “the snow mountains,” transliterated in Chinese as gongga ri’e (贡嘎日俄). Rock acknowledged other foreigners had visited the lowland areas of Konkaling but maintained he was the first to have explored the mountain range (1931, 30).
the next chapter. With eyes and optics trained again and again – year after year – on the peaks, it is tempting to interpret the tourism boom in Yading as the consumption of a place through the production and reproduction of photographic images. Interpreted in this way, Rock could be seen as an image-making pioneer (Balm and Holcomb 2003) whose photographs catalyzed the commercialization and commodification of Yading. However, Rock was not the only person to discover Yading. Other photographers and botanists discovered the area again decades later, and tourists visiting the reserve today repeat the discovery of Yading an even greater scale. As the reserve has been transformed into a nature destination, increasing numbers of Chinese have discovered Yading through seeing, photographing, and walking, practices that mirror the ways Rock worked out his own tenuous place in the Konka Risumgongba.

Through increased tourism, Yading has been drawn into a national travel routine, a collectively shared repertoire of practices (see Taylor 2003, 19) that continually generates knowledge about Yading. This knowledge is generated in part by inscribing practices, (Connerton 1989, 73) ways that knowledge is codified in texts, images or even built into the landscape. Photography is a particularly powerful practice of inscription, especially in bringing distant and unfamiliar places close (see Schwartz 1996; Balm and Holcomb 2003; and Crang 1997). However, the tourist in Yading is engaged in more than just the pursuit and creation of visual images. In negotiating mountain topography, weather, long travel distances, and a range of social interactions among local Tibetans, service industry staff, and other tourists, the tourist comes to know Yading in ways that remain embodied and unscribed. Such knowledge about Yading is generated through incorporating practices, ways of knowing the world and our place in it that are remembered in the body itself (Connerton 1989, 72; Casey 2000).

As domestic tourism has grown, travel within China by Chinese has become a national routine, an ordinary activity that, when repeated on a national scale, has become a constitutive
part of the production of geographic knowledge in China. While inscribing practices are often emphasized in studies of knowledge production, knowledge of place nearly always springs from bodily actions and from knowledge “sedimented” in the body (Connerton 1989, 78–79). While the bodily practices that go into photography have been studied in the past (see Crang 1997 and Yasue and Murakami 2011), the body has often been taken as a vehicle for the production of visual images (inscribed knowledge), while ignoring the ways the body itself comes to know place through picture-making practices (incorporated knowledge). Photography, in other words, is not only a means of representing a place but is itself a bodily practice of knowing place.

In their desire to see a natural and unknown place, tourists enact ways of experiencing the Konka Risumgongba established long before Yading was planned and developed for tourism. Yading has been discovered repeatedly, many times over, through practices of photography that generate and sustain the knowledge of Yading as a place that people can share in common. This chapter tells three exploration stories that illustrate how the discovery of Yading has become routine, drawn into the center of the nation through the lived experience of place. Yading’s opening as a tourism destination is not simply the end stage in a process of commercialization and commodification, but an ongoing practice of place, a socially binding experience that has been influential in remaking local and regional geographies. Indeed, the “Shangrilization” (Coggins and Yeh 2014) of China’s Tibetan borderlands has unfolded in this way, through both the representation and commodification of place and the sustained bodily practice of place. And as individual desires to explore have been repeated on a national scale, the collective practice of tourism has had an expanding role in remaking China’s national geography, especially as urban Chinese have discovered China on their own through independent tourism. Yading’s ten-year rise to national fame as one of China’s most beautiful places could not have come to be simply
by being represented and promoted as such. It required repeated discoveries, beginning with Rock and continuing through the explorations of growing numbers of Chinese tourists.

Exploration I

In the winter of 1923, from a trail in the neighboring kingdom of Muli, Joseph Rock got his first view of the Konka Risumgongba. He looked directly west across Konkaling, the southern part of what is now Daocheng, a narrow, hundred mile long county angled towards Yunnan that drops nine thousand feet in elevation between its northern extreme and its southern border (SDXB 1997, 60). Rock waited five years for the opportunity to travel to the “far-away conglomeration of snow peaks,” (1931, 3) and in late spring 1928 as he set out on his expedition he took what could be the first image ever made of the range (Figure 18). From this vantage the peaks rise on the horizon like the petals of a lotus, the geological incarnation of the Buddha’s three protector bodhisattvas. From south to north, Rock saw Jambeyang (Manjusri), the bodhisattva of wisdom, Shenrezig (Avalokitesvara), the bodhisattva of compassion, and Chanadordje (Vajrapani), the bodhisattva of power.

This unknown region was actually infamous. Konkaling’s fame grew over the first decades of the twentieth century, beginning around the time the British asserted a geopolitically destabilizing presence in Tibet in 1904. It was known for its bandits and raiders, who had attacked major settlements in every direction, as far as Liangshan to the east, Lijiang to the south, Zhongdian to the west, and Ganzi to the north. The militarization of the area by the Qing precipitated the bloody siege of the Sangpiling monastery in nearby Xiangcheng by Zhao Erfeng in 1906; Konkaling’s monastery was destroyed in the preceding months as Zhao’s troops moved in from Litang (Sperling 1976, 17; Spengen 2002, 12). Konkaling was cut off from what little trade passed through the area (see Booz 2011), and in the aftermath of war descended
Figure 18: The found horizon: the Konka Risumgongba. From left, Jambeyang, Shenrezig, and Chanadordje. Joseph Rock. (National Geographic Society.)

deep into a lawless period, when “brigandage developed into larger-scale banditry...[after Qing forces] burned entire villages, crops, and livestock, and plundered, meaning starvation” (Spengen 2002, 17). As inspiring as Rock’s first panoramic glimpse of the Konka Risumgongba was, the place itself had been broken by war.

Rock finally made it to the mountains in 1928, setting out from Muli with assurance that his party would not be harmed while circumambulating the peaks. As Rock entered Konkaling, his concerns turned to the practical. He had trouble developing photographic plates in the field and keeping his reluctant party pointed in the right direction. Rock also faced the challenges of alpine travel:

We crossed the Yaka Pass [below Chanadordje] under torrential downpours. There was no trail, and the ground was littered with slabs of schists over which the water rushed in
torrents, depositing everywhere a slippery gray mud, ...difficult enough in good weather,
but in a terrific hail and rain storm, with a howling gale driving the icy pellets into one’s
face and making one gasp for breath in this rarefied atmosphere, it [was] doubly
disagreeable. (Rock 1931, 46–47)

The party camped at high elevations, “often disturbed by the thundering noise of falling
blocks of ice, dropping and sliding from the heights above.” Near the end of his circuit, Rock
stayed at the Tsengu Gomba, transliterated in Chinese as Gongga chonggu (贡嘎冲古), or what
is known in Mandarin as the Chonggu Monastery (Chonggusi, 冲古寺). The area provided good
views of Shenrezig, but of the monastery Rock minced no words: “There was nothing beautiful
whatever, only filth and evil smells. ...my nose and throat were irritated by ammonia-like odors
from the surrounding stables.” The place Rock felt so drawn to seemed on one hand
disagreeable. But as Rock left the main valley, on one of his last mornings of the trip, he
recorded a moment more precisely than any other: at 4:30 a.m. on June 26, 1928, at 15,800 feet
and 40°F, he wrote, “I rose and stepped into the cold, gray morn. In a cloudless sky before me
rose the peerless pyramid of Jambeyang, the finest mountain my eyes ever beheld.” The climax
of Rock’s story comes at the end of sixty-five National Geographic pages in a moment of seeing
that, while it seemed to transcend the difficulty, danger, and filth of the trip, had in actuality
been born of them.

While it is tempting to read Rock’s journey as an extension of a western geopolitical gaze,
akin to Halford Mackinder’s views from Mount Kenya in 1899 (Ó Tuathail 1996) or Maxime du
Camp’s photographs of Egypt in the 1850s (Schwartz 1996), Rock’s written account of his trip
reveals his deep engagement with – his implantation in (Casey 1996, 321) – the social world of
southwestern China. Mueggler, in his account of Rock’s explorations in the 1920s, wrote,
“Rock’s archival practice...has much to teach us about how, as walking, mark-making,
image-making human beings, we draw the earth into our social lives. ...Seeing and being seen made Rock aware of his deep involvement in the flesh of the world – and its viscera, its filth” (2011, 152, 161). Throughout his travels, and as we know from his experience in Konkaling, Rock often put himself in visceral contact with the lives and circumstances of the southwestern frontier, a world he found both compelling and unbearable (ibid., 159). While Rock was unavoidably part of an American project of picturing the world (see Harrell 2011; Lutz and Collins 1993), his work as a botanist and a photographer also provided him a means of engaging in and coming to terms with the world. The underlying subject of his 1931 article is not the “objective” facts about the mountains (Rock was a terrible surveyor and cartographer; see Mueggler 2011, 211) but the social and political world of Konkaling, and Rock’s ability to get in and out of there alive. In other words, what became geographically known about the Konka Risumgongba was deeply intertwined with the story of Rock’s place in it.

I heard repeatedly from the Yading scenic area staff, village residents, and tourists that Rock had “discovered” (faxian, 发现) Yading. This was also confirmed by a county-produced, Chinese-language guidebook for sale at the tourist center titled Discover Yading (Faxian Yading, ‘发现亚丁’), an extended retelling of Rock’s National Geographic article, including the account of his morning view of Jambeyang (Xiao 2006, 52–53). The narrative that Yading was discovered by Rock is compelling – it’s a good story, after all. And yet to jump straight back to a single discovery in 1928 is to skip over other ways Yading has been discovered, to miss entirely the ways that discovering Yading has become a routine today, and to insulate the incorporation of Yading into the national geo-body from its political history. While the establishment of Yading made strategic use of Rock’s legacy of discovery, it would not have happened as it did, and become nationally significant when it did, without the travels of contemporary explorers, whose own embodied practices echo the ways Rock made his place in Konkaling.
**Exploration II**

Konkaling’s tumultuous early twentieth century had calmed by the 1940s (Qin 2007), when China was emerging from war with Japan and fighting a civil war that put the Communists in power in 1949. However, life in Konkaling remained difficult. Nearly all major settlements in the region lie above 12,000 feet in elevation, and livelihoods based on animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture were often disrupted by hailstorms, droughts, earthquakes, and other natural disasters (SDXB 1997, 7–26). Additionally, the Communist Party’s expanding presence in the area would precipitate new traumas, from early 1950s campaigns to collectivize agriculture (Shakya 1999, 138–140) to the Cultural Revolution campaigns that would lead once again to the destruction of the Konkaling monastery, which lies roughly halfway between the Daocheng county seat and the Yading scenic area. Communism would be the third state project in less than fifty years to attempt to control the area, though it would persist in setting up a government infrastructure more extensive than its predecessors.

The state’s most transformative change would come many years later through economic reform, which would open Daocheng county to the outside world. The local state would attempt to turn the area’s hardship into cultural history, and transform the Konka Risumgongba into the Yading Nature Reserve, the main attraction in a new tourism economy. These changes were aided by new botanical and photographic explorations of Konkaling, which would help stir a national interest in seeing the area firsthand.

In 1973, Yin Kaipu, a botanist at the Chengdu Institute of Biology (CIB), traveled to
Daocheng county to survey plant distributions in Yading.\textsuperscript{59} Yin had been making botanical surveys in western Sichuan since 1961, and had studied the work of the English botanist Ernest Henry Wilson, who had worked in Sichuan at the turn of the 20th century (see Glover 2011). Beginning in the late 1920s, over two decades after Wilson’s first explorations and contemporaneous with Rock, the Nationalist government undertook a national project to improve knowledge of China’s frontiers (Chen 2008). The spirit of this project would continue under the Communists, and teams of state-affiliated scientists began traveling the country’s borderlands in the 1950s to survey and classify ethnic groups, topography, flora, and fauna. This was also a time when nature was exploited for national development, with forests being China’s most important resource, economically valuable for raw materials and ecologically valuable for soil and water conservation (Harkness 1998). Extensive logging would be a consequence of industrialization throughout the country, and would become pronounced in eastern Tibet in the 1970s. Yin made repeated trips to northern Sichuan’s Jiuzhaigou valley in those days and, having seen firsthand the impact of logging in the area, reported the problem to the central government in the summer of 1978. Within four months, Jiuzhaigou and its extensive system of lakes and waterfalls was designated a national nature reserve.

In 1982, Yin returned to Daocheng and heard that the area around Yading was also threatened by logging. His reaction to the news was similar to his response to the problem in Jiuzhaigou. At a scientific conference that fall, Yin proposed establishing a new nature reserve around the Little Gonggashan (Xiao Gonggashan, 小贡嘎山), a reference to the Konka Risumgongba that recalled the taller and better-known Gonggashan (贡嘎山; Minya Konka)

northeast of Daocheng. Yin proposed calling the new reserve Yading, a transliteration of the Tibetan name of the only village in the central Konka Risumgongba valley. The Yading Nature Reserve would become a part of Sichuan’s conservation plans as early as 1985, though it would be ten more years before the reserve was formally established.

Inspired as it was by Wilson’s work, Yin Kaipu’s interest in establishing nature reserves was not simply born of his library and archival research. In his youth, Yin never imagined being a botanist, and came to it only when assigned to a government position at eighteen. Yin would travel widely in the foothills and ranges that a generation of foreign botanists had explored, walking long days over rough terrain and enduring food shortages. Of botany, he said, “it was very boring work. We did the same thing day after day, month after month, year after year. Unless you loved botany and science, you wouldn’t do it” (Morell and Wolkoff 2005). It was through this repetition, over decades of exploring Sichuan, that Yin worked out his own way of being in the world, finding his place in the mountains of Sichuan and in the history of botanical exploration. Yin’s work is, of course, embedded in and legitimated by a state geographic knowledge project, a positivist undertaking that has spanned the better part of a century, across two national governments, and had a significant impact on governance in China, from ethnic classification and the question of ethnic autonomy (Mullaney 2011) to natural resource and biodiversity conservation and the question of land use, which Yin himself has been directly engaged in. And yet, like Rock before him, Yin’s work required a bodily engagement in the world, a practice that, to borrow a phrase, drew the earth into his social life. “When I’m walking where Wilson walked,” Yin said, “I have a great sense of peace” (Morell and Wolkoff 2005). That Yin would end up having a hand in the establishment of twenty nature reserves in Sichuan seems unlikely if he hadn’t first come to value those lands himself through his own practice of place.
Around the time Yin first surveyed Yading, Chengdu-born Lù Linglong had been sent down to work in Liangshan prefecture, an autonomous ethnic region in southwestern Sichuan.\(^60\) Through the 1970s, Lù worked as a blacksmith on railway construction projects in Chongqing and later in Xinjiang, but once China’s higher education system resumed after the Cultural Revolution, Lù was able to participate in a short-term course in photography in Beijing. He began traveling more extensively on his own in remote parts of Sichuan in the 1980s, spurred by his interest in photography and his previous experience in the mountains among China’s ethnic minorities. As he explored western Sichuan in 1982, Lù arrived in Daocheng unaware of the three sacred peaks a hundred miles south; he departed vowing to return someday to see them, but waited over a decade for the chance.

In 1994, Yin Kaipu and the CIB organized a survey of Daocheng with a team of Chinese, English, and American scientists. Their consultations with the local government would be part of a renewed plan to finally, and formally, establish a nature reserve. As part of the plan to open the reserve, the local government sought to promote the area by producing a photo book of the county’s natural scenery. In 1995 the local government hosted Lù in Daocheng as the project’s photographer. While Lù was not the only one to photograph Yading in this period, his early involvement with the local government, and his subsequent photographs of the reserve – published in Chinese National Geography magazine and elsewhere – would become widely known, and contribute to his fame as a photographer of China’s western region.

Yin’s interest in forest protection and Lù’s photographic work were drawn even more closely together in 1996. In March, the Daocheng county government officially established the Yading Nature Reserve, and in April, Lù’s first monograph, *Daocheng: the remote land*

---

\(^60\)Here and following from author interviews in 2010 and 2012).
Daocheng: zai na yaoyuan de difang, 稻城－－在那遥远的地方) would be published
(Figure 19). The Yading Nature Reserve covers roughly one fifth of Daocheng County – about
520 square miles altogether (SDXB 2009, 3, 30), well over twice the size in total area of
Jiuzhaigou (HBSB 2009, 102–08). With natural beauty that rivaled Jiuzhaigou, Yading rapidly
gained the attention of higher government offices. Within a year of its establishment, Yading
was recognized as a province-level reserve, and in 2001 it was recognized as a national-level
reserve. Tourism and conservation had converged on Yading simultaneously, and the opening
of the reserve would from its earliest moment be the opening of a nature destination. When
proposing the reserve in 1982, Yin Kaipu had mentioned that the ecotourism development
underway in Jiuzhaigou was a model for balancing conservation with poverty alleviation. With
the coming boom in domestic tourism in the 1990s, the balance struck there between
conservation and tourism development would become a model for other reserves and parks (see
Zinda 2014). By 1995, the Daocheng county government had already turned to tourism as a
breakthrough point (tupokou, 突破口) for local economic development (SDXB 2009, 271). It was
a small jump to connect the charismatic mountain scenery under protection with the cultural
economy of tourism booming in other parts of China (see Oakes 1998.).

The county leaders who had invited Lü to Daocheng wrote the foreword to his book.
While not explicitly writing in their official capacity, they began in an official style with the
hard facts – latitude and longitude, elevation, and relative distances. They ended with a flourish:

Daocheng is a pretty country maiden who has been staying at her boudoir and unknown to
the outside world. Its heavenly natural scenery, simple and unsophisticated customs, and
mystical primitive human landscapes, having broken through the barriers of time and space,
shine with charm and enchantment which have attracted photographers, whose artistic
pictures present its beauty and charm before us. (Lü and Wang 1996, 4–5)
This stretched metaphors of opening and discovery far beyond anything Joseph Rock wrote about the place, and yet it echoed the theme of seeing unknown territory. Lü’s nature photography of Daocheng county was presented as both the debut of a new place and a call to action to protect nature by getting out to see it. The book was dedicated “To those who love the nature,” and the facing page was printed with a map of southwestern Sichuan, showing roads and driving distances from major cities. The new Yading Nature Reserve appeared as prominently as the provincial capital, Chengdu, and the famed Emei Mountain, an early sign that Yading was being positioned in a new geography.

Lü’s photos would be used alongside Rock’s in official publications and promotional
material. However, as with Rock, there is more in Lü’s photography than the production and circulation of the photographs themselves. When I asked Lü what he did during his sent down years, he instinctively made the hammering motions of a blacksmith at a forge. His answer lay not only in his mind, but also in the arms that carried their own memory of that labor. Lü spoke of the extreme conditions of those years as a personal “tempering.” He had grown up in the city, and knew his place there, but his interest in the world outside (chengshi yiwai, 城市以外) grew from his time in the countryside. Lü said, “My whole life I’ve been interested in things I’m unfamiliar with, and photography has been my tool. Travel and photography are basically one and the same... They are inseparable.” At sixty, Lü continues to travel across western China photographing some of the world’s most rugged terrain. His work has been important in representing western China as a region worth valuing, protecting, and exploring. It has also long been a way of making his own place in that world.

Exploration III

When Yading was established in 1996, visiting the reserve involved a fifteen mile trek that climbed a full mile in elevation to its high lakes at 15,000 feet. Yading’s rugged terrain is both its main attraction and its biggest obstacle to tourism development. This basic fact runs through Daocheng’s first tourism master plan, created after a county-level decision in 1999 to speed tourism development. The plan referred to Yading as a scenic spot (jingqu/jingdian, 景区 / 景点; see Nyíri 2005), a reference to the part of the reserve to be developed for tourism, roughly matching the area that Joseph Rock had explored. The plan ranked the county’s five main scenic areas on a standardized scale; Yading was given 9 out of 10 points for notoriety, 10 of 10 for uniqueness, and 24 of 25 points for sightseeing value – altogether a 90 percent score, making it an AAAA tourism site in the planners’ eyes.
The tourism master plan referenced the need to protect Yading’s natural environment, calling for the construction of boardwalks to minimize the trail damage from tourists (DZSL 2001, 76). This is a strategy implemented in many nature destinations, and one that found early, influential success in the Jiuzhaigou valley. The Yading plan also called for the closure of long sections of the pilgrimage route to horse trekking, a move that would in subsequent years threaten the tourism income for some local residents and cause at least one violent incident with authorities. While the plan acknowledged tourism’s ability to help alleviate poverty, its concrete objectives targeted tourist bodies: how to increase the number of “person-visits,” how to transport tourists to and through the reserve, how to house and feed them, manage their waste and their medical needs. The plan envisioned the tourist experience as a one-day visit for tour groups (ninety percent of expected visitors), with a two-day visit for independent tourists, who would stay in one of the tent camps set up within the reserve. In 2010, while the plan had projected 350,000 visitors annually, 92,000 made the trip, most traveling independently of a guided tour group. In the years following the plan, even as mass tourism failed to take hold, the reserve continued to take steps to prepare for greater numbers. A six mile cement road serviced by a fleet of gas-powered carts was built within the scenic area, and a 23-mile long improved road constructed from the tourist center to Yading Village.

Yinghua and I traveled this road together on her visit, and we stopped at the turn that presents visitors with their first full view of Shenrezig and Chanadordje. It is a turn that usually resulted in a synchronized “wah!” from bus passengers, and a clamoring rush of bodies and cameras to one side of the vehicle. At peak times, the viewing platform along the road was crowded with vehicles and tourists. When Yinghua stepped to the edge of the turnout, she took a single photo with her phone, and then stood quietly, taking in the view. It was a moment that stood out among the usual frenzy of group photos, individual photos, self-portraits, photos
jumping in the air, photos akimbo, and the occasional guttural yell into the valley by a male
tourist announcing his presence. In being so easygoing about photography, Yinghua seemed
out of place.

The following day, Yinghua and I visited the Chonggu Monastery – recently rebuilt for the
first time since the Cultural Revolution – and then walked farther up the valley to the lakeside
viewing platform positioned for iconic views of Shenrezig. Yinghua never seemed eager to
photograph Yading, and twice where most tourists stopped to take photos, she put in earphones
and sang softly to herself. Yinghua had already seen much of Sichuan and Xinjiang before her
visit to Yading. After her 2007 through Sichuan, once back in Shanghai, she made a slideshow of
her trip to share with friends, calling it, “Walking alone in the world – 2007 Sichuan travels.”
The slideshow began with a map of western China, with red stars marking “My footprints.”
While she traveled without a camera, the presentation was full of photos collected from
acquaintances and friendships made along the way.

The fact that Yinghua was less concerned with taking photographs than many other
tourists highlights the ways that many of the bodily practices that go into photography are the
same practices required just to be there. This is particularly clear in a place like Yading, where
even with improved trails and motorized shuttles, visiting the reserve is an unavoidably
physical event. For most tourists, seeing the high lakes in Yading requires a hard uphill climb,
nearly always over the same mud and schist that Rock described. Hail and rain storms are
frequent, especially in the monsoon months. Like Rock’s climactic view of Jambeyang,
enduring a reasonable amount of hardship is often what makes a moment of seeing possible in
Yading, be it the joy of seeing a mountain peak shine in the morning sun, or the disappointment
of seeing only rain and mist after traveling so far.

The high elevation, steep terrain, mercurial weather conditions, and long walking
distances of Yading, on top of altitude-related disruptions to sleep and appetite, make it nearly impossible to essentialize the tourist in Yading as a picturing, gazing subject. The critique of the tourist gaze (Urry 2002) has been a recurring theme in tourism studies, though the recent turn to embodiment (Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlstrom 2001) raises questions of its own, such as what role representation continues to play if all practice is embodied, or how evanescent practices in place are related to enduring aspects of social and cultural life (Cresswell 2012). Many would likely agree that “geographical representations – in the form of maps, texts and pictorial images of various kinds – and the look of landscapes themselves are not merely traces or sources.... They are active, constitutive elements in shaping social and spatial practices and the environments we occupy” (Cosgrove 2008, 15). It is clear there is some kind of important relationship between representation and practice, but in what specific ways? Clarifying the relationship between inscribing and incorporating practices is a compelling way to begin an answer, since it asserts that what we know cognitively about place is nearly always connected in some way to our own or others’ bodily practices in place. To focus only on the representational power of photography to inscribe knowledge of a place would be to ignore the ways that such geographic representations shape social practices by drawing upon shared bodily memories of being in place. As bodily encounters of Yading are repeated among a growing population of Chinese, photographs of Yading become more than abstract displays of beautiful scenery; they become full with the shared knowledge of being there.

“Seeing” Yading is a practice of place, a bodily engagement with the physical and social world of a specific time and location, and Yinghua’s experience highlights the ways that photography cannot be reduced to photographs. The growing popularity of photography and travel has made this fact even more apparent. As digital cameras have progressively become less expensive and put cameras close at hand for nearly everyone who can afford to travel in China,
the practice of popular photography has changed. LCD screens make photographs instantly available to tourists while they are still in the place being represented and are still engaged with the people within the frame (Larsen 2008). This enables immediate social interaction, with photography taking on the role of a “collective technology, a resource for ‘face-to-face’ sociality” (Scifo 2005). The repetition of photography in Yading is not only about the individual search to capture an iconic image – the inscribing practice – but is also a socially embedded practice of incorporation. Photography is not only about the image itself, but the range of social practices (see Larsen 2006) that travelers employ in making their own place. These are deeply political practices, with consequences for those whose livelihoods are made in that scenery.

Knowing Shangrila, knowing the nation

The timing of Yading’s opening was fortuitous. While the park rose in official status in the first few years after its establishment, little changed in the way of tourism. However, the county’s plan to speed tourism development came after the 1999 announcement of the national Open Up the West program, which would begin affecting Daocheng almost immediately. Daocheng county was among the last areas of China to open up to the outside world (duiwai kaifang, 对外开放), and while Open Up the West didn’t explicitly focus on tourism development, once its demands were translated into action at the local level, tourism development often became a strategy to realize project goals. The Daocheng county tourism plan made this link explicit (DZSL 2001, i). Open Up the West was an enormous undertaking, targeting a newly defined geographic region covering well over half of China’s total landmass.

---

Coming at the end of a decade of socioeconomic change, the program both reflected and cued a new national interest in the west. The decade to follow would be a boom in new forms of domestic tourism oriented toward rural and western China. And the early 2000s would bring the boom to Yading, rediscovered just in time for a socioeconomic tipping point in urban areas that would make tourism and photography a normal part of life.

There is perhaps no better indicator of the national desire to explore western China than the ways Shangrila became synonymous with tourism and development. In 2001, Yunnan would establish the first Shangrila, beginning with an administrative name change and subsequently with a placemaking project that inscribed an “authentic” Tibetan culture in Gyalthang (Ch. Zhongdian, 中甸; Koläs 2008; Hillman 2003; Oakes 2007), a traditionally Tibetan town in the northwest of the province. Other areas in eastern Tibet would compete for the Shangrila name, Daocheng County being the most prominent. A few months after Shangrila was officially established in Yunnan, Sichuan approved the renaming of Riwa township (Riwa xiang, 日瓦乡), where the Yading tourist center and management offices are located, to Shangrila township (Xianggelila xiang, 香格里拉乡). The following years were a chaotic time, as the branding and placemaking of Shangrila proceeded at multiple sites at once. But by 2003, Shangrila had been taken up into a regional tourism and conservation project that targeted yet another Shangrila, the Greater Shangrila Ecotourism Region (Da xianggelila shengtai lüyou qu, 大香格里拉生态旅游区), an interprovincial region focusing on tourism development that reflects a similar approach to regional development as the Great Western Development strategy.

By turning much of eastern Tibet into Shangrila, the central government and participating provincial-level governments sidestepped the immediate concern for who could claim the Shangrila name. But Greater Shangrila also offered a chance to stimulate tourism and would be one of the main national tourism development priorities in China’s Tenth Five Year Plan. Facing
declining tourism in 2003 because of the SARS crisis. Sichuan turned its attention to developing a new provincial-level tourist site to rival Jiuzhaigou and the Giant Panda (see Chapter Three). Tourism growth in Yading began to accelerate after this point, as it was positioned as a more important tourism resource for Sichuan and a prime location at the heart of Greater Shangrila.

Joseph Rock’s legacy became integral to Yading partly because his exploration of the area provided a direct connection to the Shangrila story. The Daocheng county annals explain that the English writer James Hilton created the Shangrila idea for his book Lost Horizon after consulting Joseph Rock’s research in Tibetan areas (SDXB 2009, 40). While a direct link between Rock and Hilton has yet to be clearly established – and the Shangrila monastery in Lost Horizon could not be more different than the Chonggu Monastery of the 1920s – there are elements in the book that invite comparisons to Rock. Hilton’s Shangrila was an enjoyable, though discomfiting, place that depended on the outside world for its luxuries, even as it fought to maintain its distance from it. And there are moments when Hugh Conway, the main character, gazes at the sensational, pyramidal peak of Karakal, bringing to mind the climax of Rock’s journey to Konkaling. Joseph Rock’s explorations provided Daocheng county with a strategic heritage resource in its claim to be Shangrila, an “authentic” piece of Konkaling history that could be reinscribed as part of the new nature reserve and the new regional geography.

The ordering of China’s southwestern geography through tourism, conservation, and the Shangrila brand unfolded through local and regional placemaking projects undertaken by a mix of state and private enterprises. Much of eastern Tibet has been made governable (Rose 2004),

---

as state thinking about culture, nature, and leisure has been territorialized in the form of
Shangrila. However, the power of Shangrila as a placemaking strategy did not arise simply from
the state inscribing the name, but rather from the fact that it could attract tourists, whose bodily
presence is the foundation of the tourism economy. Tourists after all are the desirable subjects
of tourism development planning and are embedded in its grid of discipline (Certeau 1984, xiv),
its techniques of encouraging and discouraging certain behaviors. More generally, the Chinese
state has worked to make domestic tourism an exemplary form of consumption (Klingberg and
Oakes 2012.), an increasingly ordinary part of social life and an absolutely vital part of the
economy. The success of many placemaking projects throughout southwestern China depends
on keeping tourist bodies in motion.

The prospect of ever-greater numbers of tourists exploring the Sino-Tibetan borderlands
recalls a classic argument about tourists as explorers:

Paradoxically, ...[the explorer] serves as a spearhead of mass tourism; as he discovers new
places of interest, he opens the way for more commercialized forms of tourism... His
experiences and opinions serve as indicators to other, less adventurous tourists to move into
the area. As more and more of these move in, the tourist establishment gradually takes over.
Thus, partly through the unwitting help of the explorer, the scope of the system expands
(Cohen 1972, 175).

This perspective on the exploration of tourists tracks with the idea of a “first locator” in
the photographic discovery of a place (Balm and Holcomb 2003, 160). These arguments portray
exploration as a linear process, leading from unknown to known, and from an “authentic” state
to a commercialized copy (see Oakes 2006). Many Chinese, already having experienced
expert-organized group tourism, are seeking more out of travel than mass tourism can provide
and turn to self-organized trips. There are many precipitating factors for this, ranging from higher disposable income, to private car ownership, to the large amount of up-to-date travel information available on the Internet (see Chapter Two). But the new interest in independent forms of tourism in China should not be mistaken as a kind of freedom from the institutional tourism industry. After all, the establishment of a mass domestic tourism industry beginning in the early 1990s made the boom in independent travel possible. Nor should independent tourism be mistaken as a politically unencumbered leisure practice, particularly in the contemporary context of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Instead, as domestic tourism – independent tourism in particular – has taken on elements of exploration in contemporary China, it must be taken as an important practice in itself instead of being reduced to a functional role in a larger system.

The repeated discovery of Yading by tourists is inevitably embedded in a placemaking project that commodifies nature, often to the detriment of local livelihoods and identity. The discovery of Yading is also embedded in national priorities of conservation, which have always been closely tied to other political, economic, and social goals. Conservation and tourism, for example, were never separate, or even necessarily conflicting, goals in Yading. And for protected areas established in China after the mid-1980s – meaning, most of them – the example of tourism development in Jiuzhaigou looms large, as it was the first case of conservation becoming economically productive and profitable. Finally, the discovery of Yading is embedded in a global conservation project, as it was designated a UNESCO Man and Biosphere site in 2003.

While the state has been the primary placemaking agent in Yading, it is the repeated explorations of domestic tourists – and the socially binding memory of those travels – that has fueled Yading’s ten-year transformation from a relatively unknown nature reserve to being integrated into new regional, national, and international geographies. In traveling on their own across long distances, dealing with weather and elevation, and in seeing, photographing, and
walking through Yading, tourists enact ways of knowing that came long before the reserve was built for tourism. Yading Village became a center for tourist lodging because villagers opened their homes, not because a tourism master plan demanded it. The tent camps within the reserve were set up out of necessity, since without roads a trek through the protected area would take days. The major trails in Yading follow the pilgrimage route that has been traveled perhaps as long as three hundred years. The master tourism plan for the reserve begun in 1999 was in many ways a description of what already existed in the area.

Yading has been inscribed in new regional geographies, as Sichuan’s Shangrila and as part of the Greater Shangrila Ecotourism Region, though these new geographies have become powerful and permanent only to the extent they are lived out and practiced. The notion of discovering and exploring Shangrila has not only provided the basis for a regional tourism economy, but has heightened domestic travel’s role as a way of knowing China’s geography. Mirroring the rural-to-urban movement of migrant labor, urban Chinese have become interested in rural and remote areas. And as urban – and industrial – China has been incorporated in rural migrant bodies over the past thirty years, so too has “the rest” of China begun to be incorporated into its urban bodies as domestic tourism has boomed.

The practice of place is always both to experience place according to plan and to make a place of one’s own. Joseph Rock’s exploration of Konkaling was both a part of a western project to know China and a part of the way he found his own place in China. Yin Kaipu and Lü Linglong’s surveys of Daocheng were integral parts of making that remote region known to the nation, just as they were important in working out their own places in Sichuan. Yinghua’s travels to Daocheng and beyond were a part of the rising tide of tourism in China’s remote west, and a part of making her own social world. Over the years, the embodied practice of seeing Yading has become an ongoing social practice, repeated by Chinese tens of thousands of times a
year. Yading has become a part of the national imagination because it has become a routine discovery, being geographically known not only through its representation but also through sustained bodily practices that layer new knowledge of a nation in the bodies of its travelers.
The new politics of geographic knowledge

A map created a nation, though not single-handedly.

– Thongchai Winichakul

“I didn’t really think there was much to see in the Stone Forest,” Zhou Liang said. He had been in college, in the summer after his third year, when he took a week-long trip to Kunming with two classmates.

This was Zhou’s first trip on his own. One of his friends was from Yunnan, and had relatives in Kunming. The college students didn’t have much money, but with a place to stay, they only had to pay for their train tickets and entry fees. Before the trip Zhou knew what most people knew about Kunming and Yunnan – it had a mild climate, it had the World Horticulture Exposition Garden, the Yunnan Nationalities Village, the Stone Forest. “I thought Yunnan wasn’t as developed as Sichuan – even if Sichuan wasn’t that developed yet, Yunnan was poorer. I really didn’t know that much.”

One of the things he remembered most about the trip happened at the Stone Forest. “You need to hire a guide there, otherwise it’s easy to get lost or you’ll just miss some of the sights.

---

So we bought tickets, and then went to find a guide. It was really strange. There was a tourism center, and inside was a room full of tour guides. They were all sitting in chairs.” The guides were all female, and dressed in Dai minority costumes. “We went in and had to walk up to someone and say ‘Let’s go’ and give her our ticket. It felt very weird, as if we were choosing a person like we would a cat or a dog.” They followed the guide through the park. “There are all these natural rocks – one that looked like an elephant. I really wasn’t interested. I studied engineering, and maybe my imagination wasn’t very good, but I just thought, ‘If you tell me that’s the head of an elephant, fine, that’s the head of an elephant. If you’d told me it was a horse, fine, it’s a horse.’ I just looked and looked; there wasn’t much to remember. I remember the lines, all the people blocking the way, everyone saying ‘Let me through, let me through.’”

“It was uncomfortable with the guide always there,” he said. “If you wanted to take a photo or make a joke, there was always someone standing there watching you. If you wanted to stay longer in some place, the guide had to wait, and you were afraid of holding her up – she’d told us we had three hours. On the way out the guide lead us into a tea shop and said ‘This is our local specialty, Pu’er tea,’ and invited us to try it. She explained which teas cost how much, implying that we should be interested in buying. I thought this was already a paid service, why would a paid guide try to get us to buy even more? It was a bit excessive. She said ‘We’re all just trying to put food on the table, please understand. It’s okay if you don’t buy anything.’ But she’d already taken us there.”

“If you go someplace where there’s a famous scenic spot, people will tell you you’ve got to go there. I can say I’ve been to the Stone Forest, but I liked Kunming better,” he said. By this time Zhou was already interested in cities – he’d thought of studying urban economics in graduate school, and participated in online discussion boards about urban studies focused on his hometown of Chengdu. Traveling for the first time, he felt free from the reserved demeanor
he had when traveling with his parents, and one of Yunnan’s most famous sites didn’t make much of an impression. “We were laughing and joking the whole trip,” he said. “Because of that trip, when I travel I’m in a great state of mind.”

“We were headed down the mountain,” Yinghua said. “We were on horseback traveling along a very narrow and steep trail.” She had been about ten years old, and this story came to her when I asked about her early memories of travel. “It was a deep drop off a cliff to one side and my father and mother were so afraid they got down and walked. I felt comfortable on my horse and stayed on. I wasn’t scared at all. My parents both thought I had guts doing that.”

Besides the horse ride, Yinghua said she didn’t remember much from the trip to Zhangjiajie, another of China’s most famous nature parks. “The views in Zhangjiajie are pretty, but to be honest I don’t remember much of them. My deepest impression was that horse ride. I was happy and didn’t think at all about falling; I just sat on the horse the whole time feeling happy.” The scenery had faded faster than the feeling. “I still ride well now,” she said, “maybe there’s some influence from when I was young?”

The trip to Zhangjiajie was one of a few she took with her parents. “My father was a newspaper editor,” Yinghua told me. “He would take me on business trips. My mother and I would spend time in the hotel and he would call us to meet him for meals or go visit scenic spots. The people who hosted my father would tell him to take me to some famous place – like the Great Wall – and we’d go.” Yinghua remembered those visits: “There were many, many, many people at those sites,” she said. Looking back on it she found the commercialization distasteful, but at the time she remembers, “There were too many people, and I had no interest in the place – even the Great Wall was nothing special.”
As with Zhou in Chengdu, these stories unfolded during an interview in Yinghua’s hometown once she’d returned from Yading. These trips with her father were business with a bit of play – dinners in the hotel, a quick tour of a scenic site – “The usual standards of mass tourism,” Yinghua said. Besides a single trip she took with her mother to a hot spring – an FIT tour organized by Ctrip – she’d never been on a package tour. “I have a lot of friends who joined tour groups, but they went to the most boring places. But what I disliked most was that everything was prearranged, what time everyone had to meet, what time they had to leave.”

“I remember when I was still in school we would have an outing every spring. I hated it when the teachers would say ‘You can go do this for a few hours. You have to meet here at a certain time. It’s decided you’ll go there. You can’t go to those other places.’ It just made me want to do the opposite and go to where they told us not to go. I really disliked that sort of thing.”

Independent tourists in China – those like Zhou and Yinghua – have not simply learned new ways of being tourists within a state-structured system, but have learned new ways of doing tourism, which is to say, of participating in the ordering of economic and social relationships as well as the knowledge that they and other tourists employ in the course of organizing and undertaking travel. Modern tourism industries around the world have increasingly taken on the characteristics of knowledge-based industries (see Pizam 2007). This is also the case in China where tourism information and services have moved online, and where domestic tourists have taken to researching, planning, and undertaking travel on their own. The role of knowledge in tourism goes beyond simply that which is employed by the industry or by tourists in planning travel or sought intentionally through “serious leisure” (Stebbins 1982).
Knowledge is also important in articulating power relationships ordered through tourism, in the making of tourists as subjects (Hacking 1999), in the making of tourism landscapes (Jokinen and Veijola 2003), and in the ways that tourists themselves are a part of ordering tourism, acting within and upon external orderings as they make choices about fulfilling their own needs and desires.

This chapter addresses the dissertation argument, that through exploring place, China’s independent tourists have become engaged in a new politics of geographic knowledge production that is integral to sustaining the national geo-body. This chapter is both the culmination of the preceding chapter discussions, and the conclusion to the dissertation overall. It lays out three ways that independent tourism can be seen as having ordering effects upon the dominant state tourism order. First, it is at the center of the shift in tourism knowledge production from predominantly state experts to including ordinary Chinese. Second, it is engaged in a politics of territorialization, where the active engagement and bodily presence of independent tourists is central in reterritorializing parts of China for tourism. Third, without the insulating experience of package tourism, and the desire (at least for part of the time) to break free from the tourism system, independent tourists are part of a politics of place that, while unavoidably being caught up in the state’s tourism ordering, work out through their own spatial practices the potential to stand apart from the state. Following this discussion, this chapter summarizes the dissertation overall in a concluding section.

Before turning to the question of the politics of new geographic knowledge practices, I want to first draw out some of the findings implicit in the tourist stories that run through this dissertation. Part of what makes inscriptions and representations powerful is their material and cognitive presence. They are able to be transmitted technologically, promoted widely or destroyed, and they provide endless material to interpret and analyze. Practical, bodily
knowledge was one of my central interests in undertaking this project, and yet it also was an empirical challenge: How could I find empirical evidence of a form of knowledge that remains non-discursive and layered in bodies? How could I present the notion of a bodily production of the geo-body in a way as effective as Thongchai’s use of maps, the visual evidence for the creation of the Thai geo-body over time? The short answer is that I couldn’t, simply because tourists are less engaged in reproducing representations of a geo-body than they are in living it out, putting to use, and routinizing the practices that go into creating and the sustaining a geo-body. In other words, the tourists I observed in Yading were engaged in experiences of place that are implicitly generative of the kind of geographic knowledge that gives form and shape to the representations and discourses of a national idea. Tourists did not do this intentionally, and they were not formally engaged in any way in generating propositional knowledge about the nation. Most were simply out to have a good time. In traveling and walking with independent tourists traveling to Yading, I was not seeking to understand how the geo-body is represented or inscribed or consumed, but rather I sought to understand how a simple bodily encounter in place, repeated collectively over time, can layer lessons of the nation that enable an abstract nation-making idea into something that can provide a felt sense of identity and appear to endure.

The last page of Thongchai’s book, Siam Mapped, includes the epigraph that opens this chapter. The line is enigmatic, coming at the end of a book that argued clearly and effectively that maps were the technology that created the Thai geo-body. Thongchai seems to recognize that as powerful as maps are, they don’t explain everything, and that there may be more to the story of the geo-body’s production. Thongchai’s analysis of the creation of the geo-body emphasized the newly-realized “truth” of the Thai geo-body, and the collection of maps that gave the nation a shape. And yet he spends much of the book discussing a process of practical
knowing that came before the maps: The travels of surveyors and even the king himself were a central part of a story that holds the map paramount. While Thongchai argues that the representations and discourses surrounding maps were powerful in creating the Thai geo-body, running through his analysis are spatial practices where propositional knowledge – of how and why to survey certain topographies and not others, what techniques and strategies are needed for mapmaking, of how to record and present a field experience – was put into practice and lived out through traveling and surveying the borderlands.

Like Thailand, the creation of China as a modern national geo-body required the real, embodied practices of state explorers – officials and scholars operating within a state knowledge project – whose surveys, measurements and classifications generated a conception of the national geo-body. As the results of these projects have become naturalized as national “fact” – for example, of a self-evident national territory; of 56 ethnic groups; of northern, southern, and western regions – the practical knowledge that went into the making of these ideas has fallen away, masked through the passage of time and by the amplifying power of representation. This masking of bodily practices can be seen as a process of abstraction, of effacing the lived bodies that helped generate the space that hides them (Lefebvre 1991, 195). The value of Thongchai’s work is in denaturalizing the geo-body and showing the work that goes into ordering the territorial idea of a nation. However, there is more to be said about what happens to this geo-body once it is created, once the story of its creation slips away, and once it becomes naturalized to the point of “common sense.”

In framing the discussion of the geo-body in Chapter One I asked, What is the nature of China’s national geo-body today? And how should we understand the geo-body as an ongoing politics of territory? These are questions aimed at denaturalizing the geo-body not as the now-fixed product of a historical process long past, but as an ongoing, dynamic process. In his
study of the geo-body in China, Callahan argued that the geo-body is not simply a historical concept, but is “a site of struggle in a broader biopolitics of geobodies” (2009, 147). The geo-body does not equate to a map, but rather to what we can call a dominant spatial ordering. And it is in the nature of ordering (see Chapter Two) that it requires constant work and effort. China’s national geo-body requires continual ordering, and the state is not the only actor involved in this process. I argue that independent tourists are also involved in this ordering, and we can see this in two ways. We can see in independent tourism the performance of China’s desire for place, particularly, but not exclusively, the desire to get out of the city and explore the countryside and remote areas. The practice of “discovering” and exploring new places, when carried out repeatedly over an extended period of time becomes a practice of national knowledge important not only for establishing collectively-shared and socially-binding experiences, but also for enlivening the territorialized knowledge of the nation and adapting it to new purposes. Travel serves to concretize the geo-body, and to add layers of collective knowledge that give shape to a national idea. These routine discoveries of place serve as a national ritual, even a national commemoration, when the lay performance of exploration follows routes through the national territory that were definitive for the national geo-body. With so many Chinese traveling and interested in traveling the national borderlands, the creation of the geo-body through practical, bodily knowledge has become a routine. And it is through this routine that the geo-body is sustained.

We can also see the ways that independent tourism helps enliven and sustain the geo-body through the political effects that this new tourism practice has had. The geo-body is not merely a discourse or abstraction, but a concept of nation that is tied to the experiences of real bodies in real places. My interest in tourists and in the routines and habits of travel is a way to highlight this aspect of the geo-body, to bring it forward and help better understand not only
what goes into the representational and discursive creation of the geo-body but also what keeps it alive. The following sections each touch on an aspect of the new politics of geographic knowledge that independent tourism has been engaged in ordering. What is particularly compelling about independent tourism politically is that has developed along with the rise of individualism in China (Yan 2010), and one of the ways to frame the contribution of this dissertation overall is to consider it a partial response to the question, What does greater individualism mean for China politically? The actual comparisons between tourism and individualism in China are a matter for another research project, but it is enough for the moment to pose the question, and to suggest that the role of independent tourism in the politics of geographic knowledge is one important way.

From elite to ordinary knowledge

From the Mao era to today, the state has had a central role in inscribing the spatial form of a modern, socialist, and uniquely Chinese nation. Early in the Mao era, the CCP defined and cataloged the new national territory through surveys of physical and human geography, a national project of inscribing propositional knowledge about the national geo-body. The continuity of the geo-body was central in the CCP’s claim over the territory it sought to govern, and the primary geographic project at the time was not to create a new national geo-body so much as confirm the integrity of the geo-body that had been codified in the preceding decades under the Nationalist government. Sustaining the geo-body was a critical mission, and efforts to identify and classify ethnicities (minzu shibie, 民族识别) (Mullaney 2010) were aimed at establishing the basis for a new governing structure. The Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and the Tibet Autonomous Region were both created during this time, new territories within
the nation tied explicitly to Tibetan identity. With national boundaries fixed, the contents of the nation and the territorialization of sub-national regions became the primary concern.

During my fieldwork in Chengdu I found in a used book store a copy of the first national atlas produced in China under the CCP (mine is a tattered fourth printing from 1958). The structure and sequence is almost identical to recent editions, with a map of the world and of Asia preceding a dozen national maps covering administrative boundaries, geology, population and climate. The final national map is of the geographic distribution of ethnic minorities; the new Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is marked. The function of a map like this is different than the maps Thongchai used to speak of the creation of the Thai geo-body, which by comparison were essentially borders drawn around empty space that serve Thongchai’s point that the national idea was created first by establishing the conception of a national territory. What remains to be told in Thongchai’s story is how that map fills in, how the role of the geo-body shifts from creating a sense of national territory readable against other national territories to sustaining national idea tied to that territory.

After China as national idea was territorialized, the role of the map has not diminished, but serves as a constant reminder of China as a national whole (see Callahan 2009). Edensor wrote of a similar kind of shift, that “once the nation is established as a common-sense entity... the mass media and the means to develop and transmit popular culture expands dramatically, and largely escapes the grip of the state, being transmitted through commercial and more informal networks” (2002, 4). New demands on the geo-body emerge with time, as the propositional knowledge about a national territory is incorporated into the practical knowledge of a national topography, the knowledge of a nation of places (topos).

The first way we can see independent tourism as changing the politics of geographic knowledge in China is in the shift in national knowledge production from the exclusive domain
of the state to the inclusion of “ordinary” knowledge by Chinese, who have turned travel, discovery, and exploration into a national routine. As Chinese have sought out new places to explore, the knowledge of China as a territory – as a geo-body – has changed. The centralized, hegemonic state knowledge that was essential to the creation of the Chinese nation (see Fitzgerald 1995) has become less relevant to China’s independent tourists, who research and organize their own traveling, and require more up-to-date, more useful information for traveling.

To the extent that ordinary Chinese have made exploring place a national routine, domestic tourists can been seen as primary actors in the ongoing life of the national geo-body. There are two key factors that have driven this change. First, independent tourism has sought out new tourism destinations, whether in untouristed, everyday corners of cities, or in rural and western areas, from rural home stays in the near suburbs to the mountain landscapes of overland trips through ethnic minority areas across the country. Independent tourism has spread outside the package tourism geography and jumped the conceptual and physical boundaries of “tourist space.” Instead of being based on a network of bounded tourist sites invested with cultural content, independent tourism moves through a more open-ended network of places. In some cases, such as in some road trips, mountain hikes or bicycle trips, there is little tourism development at all. In other cases, in urban and rural areas alike, tourism development has already shifted toward the production of explorable places, places that invite discovery and encourage exploration by tourists.

Second, this change has required new tourism skills. Independent tourism is researched and organized by tourists themselves, and usually relies on the advice and information of peers found online in discussion groups and blogs. Without “experts” to guide travel, the possibility of self-organized tourism requires new knowledge practices. Independent tourism is not simply
the consumption of state-inscribed knowledge, but a creative process that generates geographic knowledge of its own, and part of a broader process of coming to know places, regions, and the nation itself in new ways.

New acts of geographic knowledge generation and transfer define independent tourist experiences: the Internet searches, web portals, discussion boards, online reviews, travel service websites, and downloadable travel strategies constitute new propositional knowledge that is not subject to the state censorship process before publication. Furthermore, it is not only the kind of information that is revalued here, but the practices of knowledge generation: Independent tourism works through people seeking knowledge about a place from people who have already – recently – been there. This revaluing of practical knowledge through domestic tourism in China is a key example of how a geo-body is preserved as relevant. Through exploring place – through the bodily practices generative of a practical geographic knowledge – we can trace the new ordering effects of Chinese tourists on the imagined nation.

In the sedimentation (Connerton 1989, 102) of practical knowledge in the bodies of Chinese tourists, through new national routines of travel, we can see the ongoing life of the geo-body. With more Chinese traveling to more parts of China than ever before, we can see how the archive of geographic knowledge about China has changed. We can see this in bookstore shelves lined with travel guides devoted to self-organized travel, and in documentary television programs with young hosts positioned as independent travelers in search of interesting things across China. The changes on the Internet, from the bulletin boards of 1990s to the blogs of the 2000s, and the social networks of the 2010s have become the backbone for travel information shared person to person. This is not merely a graying archive of knowledge useful in understanding the historical territorialization of China as a modern nation, but rather is living evidence of ongoing knowledge practices of a nation coming to know itself in new
ways. We can see in the practice of tourism and the generation of geographic knowledge parallels to state practices of geographic knowing. As the state project of surveying and calculating its territory shifts to accommodate the routines of a population traveling that geo-body, the role of the geo-body changes from creating a nation, reflecting in representational form a new territorial concept, to sustaining that territorial idea through practice.

The tourism industry itself reflects the geographic knowledge that is lived out through independent tourism. Many travel agencies have created new travel products to remain competitive, adding FIT services and reconceptualizing package tours to include unconventional destinations. Even the state “canon” of rated tourist sites has changed, broadening the initial focus on sites of cultural and historical importance to include nature destinations and explorable places built with an independent tourist in mind. While independent tourists are by no means the only group engaged in this change, they are perhaps the best example of the ways that the production of geographic knowledge by Chinese has become relevant to national knowledge. The age of independent tourism is an age of new practices of knowing the national geo-body, where place-based knowledge fundamental to all human life (see Basso 1996) has pushed into and been taken up by a national knowledge project that has previously been the exclusive domain of state and national elites.

The concept of place as site, setting, and/or sense breaks down along the lines of how “experience” is conceptualized (Malpas 1999). An experience may refer to a spectacle, something manufacturable, manageable, and measurable. At the same time, an experience can reflect the situated, psychological and phenomenological encounter with place. Thinking about tourism as an experience parallels similar ways of thinking about place: As an “experience,” tourism may be approached as ultimately false, as something produced and manipulated according to a political
economic structure or a governing technology. However, experience can also be approached as an active engagement with the world, with a way of knowing that is deeply social.

My concern with place ultimately leads to the point where place is politically important not only because it is produced to impose a certain kind of order, but because platial experience, the ways that human activity is explicitly situated (and therefore political) (see Elden 2001, 73), is itself the basis for politics, whether of a dominant order where politics seems to disappear in an aestheticized consumer landscape, or of a confrontational politics aimed at intervening in the place-based lives of others. These are not binary poles, but rather political outcomes of articulating external political technologies that target a known body and internal political practices that constitute a lived, knowing body.

For Dewey, “experience” is the actual life experience of an individual, the everyday encounter with the world that is constituted both through interaction with others and through continuity in time (1997, 51, 88–89). Dewey wrote that experience renders a person “more sensitive and responsive to certain conditions, and relatively immune to those thoughts about this that would have been stimuli if he had made another choice” (ibid., 37). Dewey saw this continuity as a “fact of habit,” a habitual practice not in the sense of a fixed, static way of doing things, but in the sense of a procession of experiences that are modified by those that came before and that modify those to come (ibid., 43–44). Equally important to Dewey’s concept of experience is that it does not simply go on inside of a person. He wrote,

It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But it is not the whole of the story…. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience…. Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds himself, so the issues and
problems of present social life are in...intimate and direct connection with the past. (ibid., 39–40, 77, emphasis in original)

Dewey’s notion of experience is not a solipsistic phenomenology, but describes the operation of knowledge practices that create, sustain, or silence social memory. This notion of experience as a socially-embedded habit makes up one of Connerton’s central concerns in his examination of incorporating practices in social memory:

the phenomenon of habit should prompt us to revise our notion of “understand” and our notion of the body.... Habit is a knowledge and remembering in the hands and in the body; and in the cultivation of habit it is our body which “understands” (1989, 94–95).

To understand individually and collectively requires a body in place – a spatial body. This is the central place of the body in a politics of knowledge, the fundamental political “unit,” one that cannot simply be reduced to the status of a target to be governed, one that so long as it lives continues to generate a whole, lived experience that can never be completely abstracted or fragmented. The political possibilities offered by place – in place – are not limited to those of a historical materialist analysis of political economy, but are implicitly in life itself. This is where Lefebvre’s “materialist phenomenology” (Schmid 2008, 39) is most relevant.

Lefebvre argued that our conception of space (mental, geometric) and our perception of space (material, bodily) come together in the spatial practice of lived, social space (Elden 2004, 189–190). In the case of tourism in China, the changing knowledge of place is not exclusively ordered by the dominance of abstract space, but is also ordered by the real actions of real bodies in real places. The question of tourism thus shifts from a concern with the consumption of an extraordinary tourist place to a concern with practices of exploring the everyday and the ordinary in and through tourism (Minca and Oakes 2011, 6). Lefebvre’s approach further
suggests a way to think through the production of territory, in that the same rationalizing, abstracting tendencies of the state that empty out space function similarly in terms of territory (Brenner and Elden 2009); we can see independent tourism as a spatial practice of territorialization that fills in through bodily practice a territorial understanding of the national geo-body. There are “national landscape ideologies” (Edensor 2002, 40) of national rural life echoed in the re-ruralization of places such as Pingle Ancient Town. There are the nation’s iconic sites, its sites of historical and cultural significance. Increasingly important are popular sites of assembly – parks, sports facilities, shopping districts, leisure spaces – and in the familiar landscapes of everyday life: neighborhoods, streets, residences, restaurants, markets. This territorial understanding comes through the body, through the routines and habits built up through experience, and a collective sense of inhabiting (ibid., 56).

Because of its minimal tourism infrastructure and almost nonexistent commercial development, Yading stripped away much of what is so apparent in the intensive place productions like Eastern Suburb Memory. I came to see the tourist experience more clearly as a bodily practice simply because of the lack of services and comforts, the distances involved, the elevation, the fast changing weather. While rudimentary as a tourist site when compared with Jiuzhaigou, Yading distilled the tourist experience to some of its most basic bodily components, from orienting and way-finding in a new environment, to pursuing bodily needs for warmth, rest, and food. This made the representations of Yading stand out against the potentially difficult and uncomfortable experience of actually visiting the reserve.

The spatial body is central as the point of connection between the orderings of the state and national elite and the individual and collective actions of everyday life. The notion of the body as a hinge between enframing and implacement, between a body known and a knowing body, serves to elaborate Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial body and to balance the tendency to see
the actions of Chinese tourists through one extreme or the other, as either an uncritical population coopted by and complicit in the state’s territorial project, or on the other hand as a grassroots movement of free-thinking individuals standing up and possibly subverting the territorial goals the state pursues through tourism.

Tourism as territorialization

The second way we can see the political effects of independent tourism on geographic knowledge in China is in the state project of territorializing rural, remote and ethnic spaces as tourism destinations. As any spatial practice, independent tourism is implicitly political – the lived experience of the body is a political necessity, both in the production of new spaces for exploration (Chapter Three) and in the ways Chinese have taken to exploring place (Chapter Four). As a new spatial practice, it implicitly involves a new politics.

Tourism is embedded in modes of ordering that enframe places in ways that help sustain state orderings. At the same time, to recognize that spatial bodies are required to put tourism into practice is to recognize that tourists are always engaged in their own territorializations. As important as state knowledge practices are in defining the nation – particularly through the measurement and surveying of the population and the topography – national knowledge inevitably exceeds the state’s vision, especially once a nation-creating movement has succeeded in establishing a stable national idea.

Conventional understandings of territory usually correspond to the political boundaries of a state. To think exclusively in this way is to fall into what Agnew has called the “territorial trap,” into thinking about territory simply in terms of the sovereign space of a state, and about the state as the “container” of society (Agnew 1994). Recent work on territory has elaborated Agnew’s argument, seeking to clarify what an alternative approach to territory might look like.
Elden (2010b) has been at the center of this work, and has approached the question of territory (as Casey approached the question of space) as the product of calculative, rationalizing practices that create the illusion of a “naturally”-occurring territory.

Elden argued that territory should not be mistaken for the bounded space of a state; rather, it is a political technology employed to measure land (the political-economic relation of property) and control terrain (the political-strategic relation of control and order) (ibid.). In other words, territory is not the boundary of a state, but rather the technology through which such a boundary is imagined. This technology is a prerequisite for a state movement, as it is for any other project aiming at the economic and strategic control over an area. Thought through along these lines, the question of territory changes from one simply defined and dominated by the state to an investigation into the technology that makes it possible to make territorial claims in the first place.

Of the range of tourism’s ordering effects (see Chapter Two), one of the most nationally significant is how places and regions are territorialized, that is, how places and regions are designated as economic and political entities. One of the most pressing territorial concerns regarding tourism in China is the way it has reterritorialized regions once peripheral to the creation of the geo-body into regions central to sustaining it. We can see this especially clearly in the territorialization of China’s ethnic minority areas of China as leisure landscapes. Territorialization through tourism has made the knowledge of China’s ordinary backpackers relevant and valuable enough to stand alongside the nation’s elite scholars in presenting these regions to the nation (see Chapter One). One of the most important examples of this in China today is the territorialization of Shangrila, how an imported literary idea was inscribed and incorporated into China’s geo-body.

The territorialization of Shangrila in southwestern China has typically been approached as
a state project (Hillman 2003; Kolâs 2004; Kolâs 2008; Hillman 2013). The story goes that Shangrila is a foreign idea that was adopted at local state levels as a tourism development strategy and subsequently approved by the central government. There was competition between regions for the title, within Yunnan (Lijiang, Diqing), and also across the border in Sichuan in Daocheng County and the Yading Nature Reserve. In the end, in 2001, Yunnan would establish the first Shangrila, a placemaking project that reinscribed an “authentic” Tibetan culture on the preexisting Tibetan community of Gyalthang, known previously as Zhongdian County. The history of Shangrila as it tends to be told is a history of state calculative practices which local people either support or oppose. Despite news headlines decrying the destruction of the “ancient” town, the devastating fire in Shangrila in early 2014 actually destroyed much of the “new” old town, a larger area of newly-constructed, traditionally-themed buildings developed after 2004. This new old town was one of the concrete ways that Shangrila was translated from an abstract idea into a material form.

The territorialization of Shangrila unfolded as a placemaking project in Yunnan, a rationalized plan to transform an existing Tibetan town and the surrounding region into a new space for tourism. The placemaking project that transformed Zhongdian was not a one-off project. Only a few months after Shangrila was officially established in Yunnan, Sichuan made a name change of its own: Riwa township (Riwa xiang, 日瓦乡), where the Yading tourist center and management offices are located, became Shangrila township (Xianggelila xiang, 香格里拉乡). This fact is essentially absent from the literature, as the attention of academic and journalistic work on Shangrila has focused on the former Zhongdian in Yunnan. The oversight of China’s other Shangrilas has obscured the fact that Shangrila is not simply the clearly-bounded tourist territory produced by the state, but a political strategy that requires tourists as territorial actors. The success or failure of a tourism project depends on the bodily
presence of tourists; so too does a territorial project require a bodily presence. Tourists in Yading are territorializing actors simply by putting routines of exploration into practice. Their presence in the reserve serves both to maintain a distance with Tibet, to reinforce the cultural differences that are part of desiring Tibet, and at the same time keep Tibet close as a part of China that can be toured.

In the years surrounding the redesignation of existing political administrative areas in Yunnan and Sichuan, “Shangrila” was used as both a reference to specific sites as well as a general reference to the region, including Lijiang, Zhongdian, and Diqing. But the territorial logic employed within Yunnan Province would lend itself to a territorial form that spanned provincial borders. With the multiple claims to being the authentic Shangrila, and the existence of two officially renamed towns in Yunnan and Sichuan, the idea of Greater Shangrila made its way into both popular and government discourse. One of the earliest appearances in print of Greater Shangrila was a tourism venture supported by the provincial and prefectural governments that sought to develop a tourism loop line through western Sichuan Province. While that deal never stuck, the idea did. By 2002, Greater Shangrila would be the core concept behind a new interprovincial tourism and conservation project targeting yet another new geographic area, the Greater Shangrila Ecotourism Region, encompassing parts of Sichuan, Qinghai, Tibet, and Yunnan. By 2004, “Greater Shangrila” was taken up as a national development goal, integrated into the Eleventh Five-Year Plan as one of nine geographic targets for tourism development (Zhu and Zhang 2011). That same year, an essay by the editor of Chinese National Geography called this large area of southwestern China an empty space (kongbai, 空白) to explore – a terra incognita.

The territorialization of Shangrila is not the singular, self-evident result of a sequence of historical events undertaken by the state. In the years leading up to the first formal
establishment of Shangrila in Yunnan Province there were claims among neighboring localities to being the “real” Shangrila. And in the years to follow, multiple Shangrila.s were established. These multiple territorial claims and the multiple resulting forms of Shangrila were generated through a similar political technology that took up cultural and natural heritage as a resource in developing places that fit into, and indeed function to stimulate, a growing economic base of consumption and service sector business. The cultural interest road signs in Kangding are one indication of the placemaking strategies being put into place in western Sichuan.

The territorialization of Shangrila can be considered, on one hand, in terms of how Shangrila was made through making place (the material and ideological making of Shangrila; knowledge about Shangrila), and on the other hand how it was made through tourism practices (knowledge about how to see and experience Shangrila). Lefebvre’s notion of a spatial body helps draw attention to the fact that the production of space is not simply a matter of state territorialization, but is closely tied to lived experiences in real places. This offers a model for thinking through territory and territorialization as involving both calculative practices and lived experience as related parts of territorialization.

The political technology of producing territory – measuring land and controlling terrain – is a technology of abstraction, though it is important to recognize the concrete ways such abstractions are produced. Territory establishes a social order, a set of rules about what is and what is not to be in place, a set of boundaries of responsibility, community, and membership (Sack 1997, 90, 245). The ordering effects of territory come not exclusively through new representations or discourses, but by being put into concrete practice. Shangrila was at the outset linked to the tourism economy of southwestern China, and in the ways domestic independent tourism was involved in territorializing Shangrila.

As varied as the multiple forms of Shangrila are, the territorialization of Shangrila
required not only the cognized, rationalized strategies of placemaking (notably on the part of state officials and elites), but also and necessarily the bodily knowledge of place collectively shared among growing numbers of Chinese travelers. In coming to know the Sino-Tibetan borderlands over the past twenty years, China’s traveling citizens have become a fundamental part of territorializing Shangrila. We can understand this role by considering that the cognized knowledge that was employed in producing Shangrila – James Hilton’s fictional idea, and the discourses and representations it spawned – had to be translated into a concrete, practicable form before it took on a territorial form. This transformation of literary device to territory was enabled by linking up placemaking strategies with the new desires and practices of Chinese domestic tourists. In decoupling territory from its correspondence to state boundaries, a broader understanding allows for considering, first, other possible outcomes to territorializing practices and, second, other territorializing practices that can be overlooked when the state is the primary focus.

The territorialization of Shangrila, the establishment of the Yading Nature Reserve as a tourism destination, the building of explorable places such as Eastern Suburb Memory and Pingle Ancient Town would not have been possible without the participation of actual tourists. Getting real bodies in real places is as fundamental to the operation of a tourism economy as it is to a tourism experience, and even conceding the dominance of highly capitalized abstract spaces, human platial practice cannot be reduced to them. The practical, bodily knowledge of exploring place was fundamental to establishing a new tourism economy, and this same knowledge sustains a collectively-shared understanding of what the rural, the ethnic, and the western region mean for the nation.
The third way we can see the political effects of independent tourism on geographic knowledge in China is in terms of a new politics of place. As urban and rural tourism places have been built to encourage self-organized exploration, and as exploring place has become a growing desire for more Chinese, the knowledge of China as a geo-body is generated and sustained not only by state elites and experts but by ordinary explorers. Exploring place has transformed China’s national territory into something lived and inhabited by its citizens, as well as something thought and imagined. As new knowledge of new places has come to regional and national attention, knowledge of how and where to travel has become a more integral part of contemporary life in China.

This new politics of place complicates categories of tourism and everyday life, intensifying as tourism changed from an occasional activity literally set apart from the lives of Chinese to something commonplace, built into China’s cities and countryside and incorporated into leisure desires and habits. This new politics has extended the importance of place beyond where one is from — the traditional native places, local networks, and work places — to where one has been: It is sometimes enough being able to say “I’ve been there.” This reveals the new political role of the body in knowing China: the geographic information created for and employed by independent tourists is not an abstracted lesson for the edification of “society,” but rather the individual, concrete, practical knowledge of particular places.

With China’s national territory more or less defined before the CCP came to power, the primary question of the geo-body has been working out how the territories within the national boundary relate to one another. This national geo-body is made from multiple elements of territorialized knowledge — resurgent identity in old regions, new official regions in the West,
new development zones, the rural migrant experience of fast-changing urban China, and urban tourist experience of China’s countryside. Running through all of these is a practical, bodily knowledge of place that is fundamental to territorialization, and the politics surrounding the production of territory (Elden 2013; Elden 2010a) – like that of producing space (Lefebvre 1991) – is as important to the continuing life of the geo-body as its creation.

In the spring of 2009 when I first arrived to begin my research, a year after the Lhasa riots had spread across Tibetan areas of China, an exhibition had been mounted at the Minorities Palace on Beijing’s west side. It was a large show composed primarily of captioned photographs that demonstrated the state vision of Tibet’s past and Tibetans’ status as members of the Chinese people (Zhonghua minzu, 中华民族). The show was a political portrait of a culture, and as is often the case, dissenting voices were left out of the narrative. Additionally, there were signs that the state held the moral standing to develop Tibet and improve the lives of Tibetans (see Yeh 2013). In the opening gallery, just to the side of a near life size sculpture of the signing of the “17-Article Agreement,” the document the CCP regards as the basis for its legal authority over Tibet, was a glassed display of tools of bondage and confinement from “old” Tibet. Not fifteen feet into the show, the starting and ending points in the narrative were clear.

With the Lhasa riots still reverberating across greater Tibet, but before a series of Tibetan self-immolations began, I completed my research, moving back and forth between Chengdu and Yading. Throughout this period, as Tibetan areas opened and closed for foreign travelers with the tourism season, domestic tourists, mostly Han from what I observed, were able to travel without such restriction. It is clear that the practical knowledge of bodies in Tibet, far from being secondary to discourse and representation, lies at the very center of this politics. And in this part of China the usual political issues surrounding tourism – the commodification of place,
the dominance of a tourism system over local areas economically, culturally, and socially – are further complicated by the dominance of a political system over human life itself.

My mind goes back to the electric carts I found hidden behind the service building in Yading. I hadn’t been looking for them – I was making the six mile walk back from the Luorong Pasture to the Chonggu Grassland along the road, and I stumbled across the broken panels and smashed windshields. It was sometimes odd during my research how “normal” Han tourism in Tibet appeared, how much like any other tourist site Yading seemed to be, even knowing full well the events of 2008 and the earlier tensions over the development of the reserve the year before. Most tourists came for the scenery, and whether the nature reserve lived up to their expectations as a most beautiful place, or disappointed them bitterly because of the weather, the political events seemed far away down the valley, and even farther away long the provincial roads. The politics surrounding tourism in Yading became more palpable to me over time, seeing the tension between an older tourism model that accommodated local horse guides and an emerging model that replaced them with roads and shuttle buses.

Some have interpreted tourism as “unofficial imperialism,” as a project of “exploration and knowledge gathering which obscured tourism’s role in the processes of expansion and domination” (Gorsuch and Koenker 2006, 8). This is a politically compelling critique, and it echoes Boyer’s critique of placemaking projects that depoliticize social complexity through aestheticization. The Tibet imagined for tourism appears similarly, as beautiful scenery emptied of trouble. But we must also keep in mind the fact that despite the aestheticization of China’s ethnic borderlands the practice of independent tourism also – potentially – provides the basis for lived experiences that destabilize this order. Tourism works around state dominance, on its weak sides or blind spots; tourists are never completely coopted by the state project. Lefebvre’s
reminder to think dialectically is important in considering the politics of geographic knowledge surrounding Han Chinese traveling in Tibet.

We should not be too eager to hope that independent tourism indicates a groundswell of political resistance, a new age of freedom in China, or even a sign of more cultural sensitivity. I see little evidence to support this kind of conclusion. Tourists are as entangled with the state as the state is with tourists, and as we’ve seen in terms of territorialization, getting bodies in motion is as important a strategy for capital accumulation as it is for pleasure. However, despite what for the time seems like an intractable political problem, I think that Han tourism in Tibet holds not only a theoretical prospect for a critical perspective on state governance in Tibet, but the practical possibility for outcomes other than tourist complicity. Tourism is one of the few ways that urban Han Chinese come into direct contact with Tibetans, and I often heard tourists describe Tibetans positively, their initial trepidation falling away as they developed a different sense of Tibet than the state narratives and news converge.

In 2014, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) released a report titled “Has life here always been like this?,” which noted that, “Despite authorities’ efforts to censor to crack down on social media, ICT was able to collect hundreds of images and messages from the popular Chinese microblogging site, Sina Weibo, using the crowd-sourced perspective of Chinese tourists to further document the harsh security measures implemented in Tibet by Chinese authorities” (ICT 2014). While the specific observations and feelings that the tourists had witnessing the mobilization of security forces are compelling, what makes this remarkable is the fact that Han Chinese tourists in Tibet are presented as valuable sources with a critical perspective. This doesn’t mean they have adopted a stance of resistance or confrontation, though it does indicate that political possibilities do exist simply in the bodily presence of tourists and the possibility of bearing witness. If Chinese didn’t strike a critical position in their
tourism, it is hard to imagine these reports would have appeared. This of course isn’t to say that all Chinese tourists adopt such a stance, and it’s likely that most do not. But the new politics of geographic knowledge based on a practical, bodily knowledge of the national geo-body opens ground for political possibility.

To see tourists as uncritical participants in a homogenized tourism system would shift the responsibility for political outcomes onto the state, and relieve tourists of responsibility for their behavior. At the same time, to see tourists as only complicit in a state project, with no hope for a political alternative would be to deny the possibility of an alternative. Because of the political potentialities of lived experience, independent tourism cannot be reduced to a politics of complicity in the state nation-making project any more than it can to one of resistance to such a project by the population. Independent tourism may hold the potential for encouraging more informed and sensitive tourism on the part of domestic Chinese tourists, and there are few other social practices happening on such a large national scale that is putting Chinese into direct contact with parts of the country that have been seen as poor, backward, remote, or even dangerous. But independent tourism, like all leisure practices, is fraught by the paradoxical relationship between lived experience – what Foucault called “capability” (1997, 317) – and intensifying power relations. Despite our desire to own our leisure, it never really belongs to us (Rojek 1995, 192), and the powers of aestheticization and of explicit political control are strong.

Domestic tourism has become politically important in China because it has put new demands on, and become generative of, practical knowledge of the geo-body. As Chinese have taken to routines of exploration, they enact the bodily link between individual place experience and a collectively-shared, habit knowledge of place. As more Chinese enact these links, a national experience is sedimented. I often overhear conversations in China’s cities about traveling to Tibet or other places outside urban China. These conversations often come across
as an expert instructing a novice: having been there seems to be a new source of cultural
authority about China’s geo-body.

This new politics has been ordered through an unprecedented shift in national knowledge
production in China, with the state’s more exclusive position as creator and arbiter of the
geo-body to a politics where “ordinary” Chinese have become engaged in producing national
knowledge shared through the population. In other words, we can argue that the ongoing
practices of place that are often dismissed as “phenomenological” and therefore disconnected
from a certain political order have become a part of the project of sustaining a national
geo-body. As the state’s goals have shifted from creating a new national territory for the nation
(see Fitzgerald 1995) to sustaining the understanding of that geo-body, the practices of ordinary
explorers – the nations exemplary citizens – have become a part of that state project. This
underlies my interest in a spatial body that articulates the external targeting of the body with
the lived body constantly creating its own space. The practical knowledge of China’s geo-body
 gained through practices of exploring place – emblematic in independent tourism – is by its
nature embedded in and influenced by the state’s dominant vision of a sovereign national
territory populated by a unified, multiethnic Chinese nation. At the same time, this national
knowledge is created through individual practices of place, which are infinitely variable,
determinate, and the basis of the possibility of a national knowledge outside of state
discourse. This fact, along with the role of independent tourism in territorializing rural and
remote spaces for tourism, and in the broader shift in the production of geographic knowledge
from state- to peer-production, indicates some of the important political changes that have
taken place in the age of independent tourism.
Conclusion

Pearl Buck wrote in 1936 that, “One of the most important movements in China today is the discovery of their own country by young Chinese intellectuals. A generation ago the most progressive of their fathers were beginning to feel a stirring discontent with their own country.... In this atmosphere of change, the present intellectual youth of China has grown up” (Lin 1936, vii). It was in that generation that China’s fluid imperial boundaries were fixed into the boundaries we would recognize today (Leibold 2007, 18). The “discovery” of the nation that Buck described came at a time when the future of the nation was uncertain. Questions about territorial integrity became a pressing concern for the Nationalist government, which faced an aggressive invasion by Japan to the east, and sought to broaden its base of power by developing the northwestern borderlands (Lin 2007).

The past twenty years has been another important period of national discovery. Again building on the reforms of a previous generation, Chinese today have taken to exploring the nation in the name of tourism and leisure. Coming nearly a century after the formalization of China’s modern national boundaries, it might seem that the question of the geo-body has been settled long ago. But in shifting the focus to the sustaining life of a national geo-body, rather than its creation, the political importance of activities like domestic tourism becomes more clear. The rise of independent tourism marks the rise of a new politics of geographic knowledge, one in which a century-old project of territorialisng the modern national geo-body has begun to be influenced by the practical knowledge of China as lived out by its citizens.

This dissertation has been an effort to come to understand changes in domestic tourism over the past 20 years, beginning with the revival of the domestic tourism industry and following the rise of the age of independent tourism. Its starting point was the observation that
a qualitative change in domestic tourism has occurred in China since the early 1990s, shifting from a period when expert-mediated, package tourism guided national desires for travel to an age when self-organized independent tourism became highly desirable. I define independent tourism as a form of leisure travel that depends on the researching, planning and completion of travel by tourists themselves, rather than relying on tourism professionals or experts. This is the essential difference between independent tourism and package tourism, and the change behind what has been called an age of independent tourism (Xiao 2011). I see the development of independent tourism as having important continuities with the past and as having an ongoing relationship with other modes of tourism in China. The continuities with the past are clear when we recognize that the state’s tourism project is historically specific, and that incremental changes have transformed independent tourism into the highly desirable leisure practice it is today.

This dissertation has approached tourism as an ordering, as an ongoing process that organizes and is organized by social relationships, economic and political forces, personal experiences and cultural productions. Far from being a phenomenon peripheral to or simply resulting from China’s significant social and economic changes, domestic tourism is an activity at the center of contemporary life. Following Franklin (2004, 280), three tasks emerge when approaching tourism as an ordering: we must account for the ways tourism becomes the object of a national ordering, the ways tourism becomes an ordering power in itself, and the ways that tourism orders places and people. These three tasks frame the structure of this dissertation.

Chapter Two looked at the ways that tourism became the object of state ordering at the outset of the reform era because of its value to the national economy. Domestic tourism was ordered in a similar way as an extension of the package tourism industry, which serviced inbound foreign tourism. However, with the rising popularity of independent tourism in the 2000s, we
can see more clearly how domestic tourism in China has taken on ordering powers itself. We can see the ordering effects of a national turn to exploration – to the desires and practices to pursue self-organized tourism to sites outside of the conventional state tourism geography – in both the new places being built for tourism and in the new kind of tourist experiences being sought out by Chinese.

Chapter Three focused on the ways that tourism orders places and the ways that independent tourism in China is an integral part of a broader set of spatial changes transforming China. For Nyíri, the state – specifically the state’s cultural authority – produces tourist sites in the form of scenic spots: bounded, controlled, homogenous tourist zones (2005, x–xi, 48–57). In trying to work out a broader theoretical approach to tourism in China, Nyíri made one of the few attempts there has been at understanding the production of tourism places as a national project. I share with Nyíri the opinion that tourism knowledge is implicitly tied to the territorial knowledge of China as a nation (see Nyíri 2005, 17). However, I am critical of Nyíri’s scenic spot model. Tourism development has become entangled with new practices and projects of place-based urbanism in China, and new placemaking strategies have been employed in the production of explorable place, leisure spaces that encourage commodified forms of exploration in less formal tourist experiences. Explorable place is not intended to describe a new type of tourist site built to represent and display culture for tourists (and calling for expert interpretation), but rather to a process of planning and ordering tourist sites intended to accommodate self-organized experiences, whether exclusively or complementary to package tourism. In addition to being a way of understanding how changes in urban China may be affecting tourism development elsewhere, explorable places offer an alternative metaphor for thinking about tourism in China.

Chapter Four developed the idea of exploring place, which is modeled on Lefebvre’s notion
of a spatial practice. Instead of characterizing the relationship between tourists and the state as structural, I’ve suggested thinking about independent tourism dialectically, intending to encompass the ways that tourism orderings work in both “directions”: The places being built to encourage and exploit exploring tourists do not simply order, but are themselves ordered by the tourists who visit them. Exploring place is a spatial practice that articulates the interconnection between self, social relationships, specific places, and one’s wider world. The tourist experience can never be circumscribed by strategies of enframing because the tourist experience is always already an “implaced” experience. The practical knowledge incorporated through the skillful meeting of needs in place generates a different kind of knowledge than the planning and the production of place. As discussed above, orderings require constant attention if they are to appear stable or permanent, and the enframing of Yading as one of the “most beautiful places in China” can be seen as functioning in this way. Though exploring place I laid out a way of considering independent tourists as active parts of a tourism ordering without limiting that action to phenomenological experience. The practical, bodily knowledge of place matters because the enframing knowledge about Yading is inseparable from the knowledge about how to travel, move, and live in that place. I demonstrated how the propositional and practical knowledge of place can be handled in tension with one another to help get at a political aspect of tourism in China that may otherwise remain unarticulated. This final chapter has extended the discussion of independent tourism as an ordering into the question of the politics of knowledge.

In addition to Franklin’s three tasks of understanding tourism as an ordering, I’ve argued that it is necessary to also address a fourth aspect, namely the ways that tourism orders knowledge. The self-ordering practices of independent tourists are generative of new collective knowledge about China as a place and nation. I’ve departed from many approaches by focusing not only on cognitive, discursive knowledge about places, but the practical, bodily knowledge
based on experiencing the nation. For Lefebvre, the body was not a metaphor or site of
discourse, but an integral part of the production of space – a spatial body. The ultimate interest
in this dissertation is to work through the orderings of places and people to an understanding of
a new mode of ordering geographic knowledge.

In addition to the propositional knowledge about China that is so critically important to
geographic discourse and representation, the practical knowledge of how to live in China has
become a valuable and central part of how China is “known” today. I have positioned this work
as a complement to Thongchai’s interest in the “politico-semiological operations” that create a
geo-body (1994, 18), in that I’ve sought to elaborate on the politico-
omatic operations of independent tourists exploring place as a way to understand the ongoing life of the national
geo-body.
References


Blecher, Marc. 1991. Development state, entrepreneurial state: the political economy of socialist


DDLX (Daocheng xian diming lingdao xiaozu [Daocheng County Place Name Leading Group]). 1986. *Sichuan sheng ganzi zangzu zizhizhou daocheng xian diming lu [Sichuan Province Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Daocheng County]*.


DXRG (Daocheng xianwei [Daocheng County Party Committee], Daocheng xian renmin zhengfu [Daocheng County People’s Government] and Daocheng Yading fengjing mingsheng guanli weiyuanhui [Daocheng Yading Scenic Area Management Committee]).


DXRZ (Daocheng xian renmin zhengfu [Daocheng County People’s Government]). 2004.


DZSL (Daocheng xian renmin zhengfu [Daocheng County People’s Government], Sichuan sheng liyou guihua sheji suo [Sichuan Province Tourism Planning and Design Institute]).


and its subaltern subjects. *Cahiers d'Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le monde*

*Turco-Iranien*, no. 25.


HBSB (Huanjing baohu bu ziran shengtai baohu si [Environmental Protection Department, Ecological Protection Division]). 2009. *Quanguo ziran baohuqu minglu [National protected area directory]*. Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe.


ICT (International Campaign for Tibet). 2014. “Has life here always been like this?” Chinese
microbloggers reveal systematic militarization in Tibet. no. 138. International Campaign
for Tibet.

London: Routledge.


Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Ivy, Marililyn. 1995. *Discourses of the vanishing: modernity, phantasm, Japan.* Chicago:
University of Chicago Press.


In *Visual culture and tourism*, ed. David Crouch and Nina Lübren, 259–278. New York:
Berg.

development. *Tourism Geographies* 1, no. 1: 70–85.


London: SAGE Publications.


Klingberg, Travis. 2007. The domestic tourist in post-Tiananmen China: a conceptual

——. 2014. A routine discovery: the practice of place and the opening of the Yading Nature


Liu, Deqian. 2002. Zhongguo guonei lüyou fazhan xingshi de fenxi yu yuce [China’s domestic


SDXB (Sichuan sheng daocheng xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui [Sichuan Province Daocheng County Annals Editorial Committee]). 1997. *Daocheng xianzhi [Daocheng county annals]*. Chengdu: Sichuan kexue jishu chubanshe.


Sicoff, Seth, Empar Alos and Roshan Shrestha. 2003. Independent backpacker tourism: key to sustainable development in remote mountain destinations. In *Landscapes of diversity: indigenous knowledge, sustainable livelihoods and resource governance in montane mainland*


Vasantkumar, Chris. 2014. Dream world, ‘Shambala,’ Gannan: tourism, landscape and the miniature in the Shangrilazation of China’s ‘Little Tibet’. In *Mapping Shangrila: contested*


Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.


Wen, Jin and Huili Gong. 2008. Zizhu lüyou gainian de tantao [Discussion on the definition of


Xiao, Tanglong. 2006. *Faxian Yading [Discover Yading]*. Daocheng xian renmin zhengfu [Daocheng County People’s Government].


Zhu, Hua. 2005. *Sichuan lüyou jingdian yu wenhua* [Sichuan’s tourism scenic spots and culture].

Beijing: Zhongguo lüyou chubanshe.


ZJJJ (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia zhiliang jiandu jianyan jianyi zongju [General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People’s Republic of China]). 2003. *Lüyou qu (dian) zhiliang dengji de jifen yu pingding* [Standard of rating for quality of tourist attractions].