

Cultural Heritage Tourism and the Ancient Tea Horse Road of Southwest China

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Abstract

Thirty years of “reform and openness” have brought great changes to the People’s Republic of China. On the positive side the living standards of a vast proportion of the population have dramatically improved and China has now realized the long cherished dream of the 20th Century to become “rich and powerful” (*fuguo qiangbing* 富国强兵). On the negative side China has experienced the same forms of environmental and cultural destruction that all nation-states undergo as they “modernize”. In terms of “cultural heritage” China has in recent decades lost a great deal of tangible heritage as the bulldozers of urbanization “destroy the old to make way for the new” (*pojiu lixin* 破旧立新). In terms of intangible cultural heritage, whilst there has been a major revival in some areas after the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), many traditional cultural practices have begun to disappear from everyday life and are in danger of becoming “museum relics” or vanishing altogether. This paper examines the possible role tourism may play in the cultural heritage preservation of China’s “Ancient Tea Horse Road” (*chama gudao* 茶马古道). It is argued that whilst tourism can play an important role in socioeconomic development and cultural heritage preservation it can also be a very destructive force in its own right.

Keywords: *China, tourism, cultural heritage, Ancient Tea Horse Road, Yunnan*

1. China’s Modernization and Cultural Heritage

The story of the People’s Republic of China’s rise to power and prominence over the last three decades is well known. Insofar as it involves more than a quarter of humankind it *is* the story of our time. China entered the 20th Century as a “celestial empire” in the last stages of dynastic death throes, a painful and tumultuous end to a sociopolitical system that had survived

relatively intact for well over two thousand years. It exited the 20th Century as a “nation-state” that, after much devastation and woe, had finally crossed the threshold of modernity and realized the long cherished dream of 20th Century reformers and revolutionaries for China to become “rich and powerful” (*fuguo qiangbing* 富国强兵). Whilst in China much of the 20th Century was devoted to finding an alternative to capitalism, in the final analysis, and with much irony, China has emerged in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis as “the saviour of capitalism”. How did this happen?

After emerging from the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) China’s leaders and elite realized that rather than making the gains in industrialization and modernization that Maoist-Leninist socialism had seemed to promise, China had in fact stagnated and fallen behind the technological-scientific and industrial gains made in the advanced industrialized countries since the conclusion of the Second World War. It was thus with a sense of urgency that in 1978 Deng Xiaoping launched the combined policies of “reform and openness” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放). Without fully realizing the ultimate consequences of these policies, or indeed the precise direction they would take China and the Communist Party of China (CPC), Deng Xiaoping unleashed social and economic forces that would not only reshape the “face” of contemporary China but of the very world we all call “home”.

The story of China’s remarkable transformation over the last three decades is well known and does not, and indeed cannot, be fully elaborated here. Suffice to say that it is still a “work in progress”, an ongoing project in social, cultural and economic transformation in which the CPC needs to constantly work to adapt its style of political governance and social surveillance (a task it seems to have accomplished with some measure of skill and dexterity). On the positive side a vast proportion of the population have experienced dramatic improvements in basic living standards. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty. Tens of millions of people have now become consumers in China’s rapidly developing market consumer economy. Chinese people enjoy more “freedom” than at any time in living memory. On the negative side of the ledger China has been unable to avoid the pitfalls of “modernization”. Like other nation-states that have passed through the fires of modernity, China too has in the last three decades suffered from the excesses of rapid development. Environmental pollution and destruction have accompanied rapid industrialization and urbanization. Many social ills absent (or “underground”) during the Maoist period have reappeared: drug addiction, prostitution, corruption, and epidemics such as HIV AIDS have created new challenges in a now highly mobile population. The very success of Deng’s policy to “let some people get rich first” has led to an increasing income and social services gap between the rich and poor, between the urban and the rural, and between eastern and western China. Closing the gap and building a

“Harmonious Society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) is now the top priority of the Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao government.

“Modernization” thus brings many benefits and conveniences. But it is also very destructive. In terms of cultural heritage, China, in the course of the 20th Century, has suffered greatly.¹ Yet as long as road and transport networks were relatively undeveloped, tangible and intangible culture managed to survive the wrecking balls. When compared to the Maoist period, and even despite the tragic and barbarous acts of cultural destruction during the Cultural Revolution, the period of “reform and openness” has witnessed the largest losses in terms of cultural heritage ever in the history of China. Certainly there was much tangible cultural destruction during the “Cultural Revolution” but it was mainly confined to defacing statues and temples. As one informant from Xi’an relayed to me, during the Cultural Revolution they chiselled out the face of the Buddha, but now in the contemporary period they raze the entire temple complex! Rapid urbanization and the booming property market have meant that many historic buildings and precincts have been bulldozed to make way for apartments and shopping malls. The ever expanding network of highways and expressways has meant that it is easier than ever to reach the once inaccessible places to plunder cultural artefacts. Once sleepy towns have caught the urbanization bug and have “redeveloped” themselves on the format of their “bigger brothers” so that China’s urban landscape seriously risks becoming a uniform scene of concrete high-rises and drab public squares and shopping malls. Indeed, the State Administration for Cultural Heritage announced in 2009 that over 30,000 items on the 1982 list of cultural heritage sites in China no longer exist, they have been forever erased from the face of the earth (cited in Branigan, 2009).

In terms of intangible cultural heritage the Maoist period was very destructive indeed. The CPC came to power with an agenda to dramatically reshape all facets of Chinese culture. It waged a war on what it regarded as “feudal” and “superstitious” practices and traditions. “Only socialism can save China”, so the famous refrain from a popular revolutionary song goes. And thus whatever was deemed not to be “socialist” was liable to be regarded as an obstacle in the way to China’s progress. During the Maoist period many cultural and religious practices were attacked, suspended and even in some cases totally eradicated. Coming into the period of reform many communities underwent major cultural and religious revivals and this has been well documented by contemporary researchers (Jing, 1998; Yang (ed.), 2008; Chau, 2008). Now the danger to intangible cultural heritage is no longer from a rampant Maoist ideology but rather from the extension of modern ways of commerce and living that breakdown the former day-to-day cycles of rural life which have been the basis for much cultural ritual and custom for hundreds if not thousands of years.

A great deal of effort has since been exerted by all concerned to revive and preserve various folk crafts, cultural practices and so on. In June-July 2004 China hosted the 28th Congress of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in Suzhou. The China Heritage Quarterly, the official newsletter of The Australian National University's China Heritage Project, heralded the Congress as a "watershed in the development of heritage concerns in the People's Republic of China" (*China Heritage Quarterly*). The first "China Cultural Heritage Day" was launched in 2006 to educate and raise awareness of the issue amongst the general public. Yet at the same time the very success of development and its ever expanding penetration into all corners of China has meant that "traditional" lifestyles are giving way to "modern" lifestyles and in the process many communities are forever transformed and "something" is lost. In areas where ethnic minorities predominate the locals refer to this process as "becoming Han" (*hanhua* 汉化) (Sigley, 2007). One particular incident that has caught the attention of the world's media in recent times is the plans to demolish the old city centre of Kashgar (Wines, 2009).

At the core of this process is the uneasy relationship between the party-state as at once the driving force of modernization and the now self-appointed cultural custodian of Chinese culture. Deng Xiaoping famously described economic development as a "fundamental fact" (*fazhan cai shi ying daoli* 发展才是硬道理) in which the means, including the loss of cultural heritage, justify the end. This has entailed privileging a techno-scientific view of social development (Sigley, 2009) in which "feudal" and "superstitious" cultural practices were to be eradicated and replaced by the instrumental vision of scientific modernity. Yet during the course of the first two decades of reform the party-state, confronted with the reality of a large-scale grass-roots revival of popular culture and religion, begins to see merit in mobilizing "tradition" to replace the waning influence of Marxism-Maoism as the key national unifier and force for hierarchy and stability. As Børge Bakken (2000) has forcefully argued, the party-state now views traditional culture as an effective brake on a rapidly changing society, as a useful force for stability and continuity. This does not, of course, mean accepting traditional culture "as it is" but rather channelling and shaping tradition to suit the purposes and agenda of the party-state. As Anne E. McLaren (2010: 31) has recently argued in relation to the preservation of cultural heritage:

... contemporary China is seeking a balance between the Marxist ideology of the recent past and its new identity as custodian of China's traditional civilisation. This balance is often an uneasy one, where the state seeks to both transmit and recreate 'traditions' in line with new economic and national imperatives.

As I mentioned above, the party-state launched the reforms without fully realizing the unintended consequences or forces that would be unleashed.

Thus whilst McLaren (*ibid.*) is right to suggest that the party-state “seeks to both transmit and recreate ‘traditions’ in line with new economic and national imperatives” it is now doing so in a context in which its agenda of national unity and stability under the leadership of the CPC must take into active consideration the internal dynamics and logic of commercial development. By this I mean that whilst there are certainly well intended efforts at cultural heritage preservation these sit very uneasily next to, or indeed beneath, the commercial imperative to develop the economy and, to put it bluntly, turn a profit. It is to this uneasy relationship that I turn to in the next section through examining the case of the Ancient Tea Horse Road (*chama gudao* 茶马古道).

2. The Ancient Tea Horse Road

Professor Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, the famous pioneering Chinese anthropologist/sociologist and student of Bronisław Malinowski, noted that ancient China had two major trading and cultural corridors. One was the passageway along the upper reaches of the Yellow River, located in what are now known as Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, and Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The other covered the mountainous terrain of Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, home to all of China’s great rivers (and indeed of many that flow into India and mainland Southeast Asia). The former is known as the “Silk Road”. The latter the “Ancient Tea Horse Road”.

Many people will be familiar with the famous “Silk Road” (*sichou zhi lu* 丝绸之路). The Silk Road is a trading passage across central Asia that for centuries served as an important land bridge between China and Europe, and of course all those civilizations and societies in between (some of which were more important and powerful than many a kingdom in Europe at the time). In recent years a great deal of work has been devoted to the research and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage along the Silk Road.

By contrast, not many people will be familiar with the “Ancient Tea Horse Road” (*chama gudao* 茶马古道), sometimes erroneously referred to as the “Southern Silk Road” (*nanfang sichou zhi lu* 南方丝绸之路). The Ancient Tea Horse Road is a network of roads and routes that crisscross Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi and Yunnan.² Unlike the “central plains” (*zhongyuan* 中原) of eastern China which relied heavily upon water networks (*shuilu* 水路) such as the Grand Canal (*dayunhe* 大运河), much of western China, being extremely mountainous, had little recourse other than to depend on the trusty horse and mule as the principal means of long distance logistics (sometimes camels and yaks were used in certain regions, and of course human porters were also common in places).

Although, as archaeological evidence testifies, there have been trails and trading routes in the region for thousands of years, it was not until the Tang Dynasty (618-907) that more formal and large-scale trade began to occur (Chen, 2004). As the name suggests “tea” was one of the major commodities being traded. Other commodities were also traded, such as horses (mainly for military use), salt, medicinal herbs, and so forth, but tea was certainly the dominant item. Much of the trade was between the tea producing regions of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou and Tibet (and such regions where tea cannot be cultivated due to altitude and/or latitude). For many centuries successive dynastic governments maintained a tight monopoly on the tea trade and used it as a means to “buy peace” with certain “unruly” ethnic groups.

The regions through which the tea road traverses include many populated by ethnic minority groups. Indeed, much of the tea was cultivated by ethnic groups themselves, and many caravans (*mabang* 马帮) were organized and led by Han and non-Han teams alike. Indeed, unlike the Silk Road, the Ancient Tea Horse Road was, up until relatively recently, still used by horse and mule caravans to transport tea and other commodities to communities still inaccessible by modern transport. So therefore, unlike the Silk Road, there remain many living cultural practices relating to the culture and social life associated with the use of horse and mule caravans, and of course to tea cultivation, production and consumption.

Yet as the road network in China continues to expand the demise of the tea road is inevitable. At this point in time the long distance horse and mule caravan is now but a fading memory. Mule teams are still used for short distances, typically from mountainside communities to the nearest public road and market. But the days of the long distance caravan are now well and truly over. The development of a modern road network has seen to that. A popular saying in China tells us that if you “want to get rich, build a road” (*yao zhifu, xian xiulu* 要致富, 先修路). Indeed the authorities take road building in China very seriously, as John M. Flower describes:

In contemporary China, road construction is a top priority for state economic planners as part of the effort to build “material civilization” (*wuzhi wenming*). Roads, however, also invoke the discourse of “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) in that roads can transport the “peasant” out of his backward conservatism by integrating him with a progressive global economy. The civilizing mission of the road construction creates an emerging border – physical and conceptual – between the new cosmopolitan China and its backward hinterland.

(Flower, 2004: 649)

Ironically, it is at this point in time when the tea road has just been “extinguished” that scholars and cultural preservation officials in China have

mobilized to preserve the tangible and intangible remnants of the Ancient Tea Horse Road. In June 2010 an important meeting was convened by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (*guojia wenwuju* 国家文物局) and the People's Government of Yunnan (云南人民政府) in Puer, Yunnan. The meeting was titled "China Cultural Heritage Protection: The Puer Forum on the Ancient Tea Horse Road Heritage Protection" (中国文化遗产保护: 普洱茶马古道遗产保护论坛). This was the first meeting ever convened to specifically discuss the cultural heritage protection and preservation of the Ancient Tea Horse Road, and the first formal step towards an application for "World Heritage" status. Delegates came from local government, research centres and various local, provincial and national levels of the cultural heritage protection authorities from Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai and Tibet. The author was privileged to be the only international representative. The Head of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, Mr Shan Jixiang 单霁翔, gave the opening address in which he outlined the overall case for "World Heritage" and the steps that would be involved to reach the point of a formal application (which is quite a complex and laborious process). The various representatives from around China gave reports on the state of the "Ancient Tea Horse Road" in their respective jurisdictions, and thus for the first time bringing a fuller picture of the tea road into sharp view. The task of protection is enormously challenging as the "tea road" is not located in any single location. It comes under the banner of a relatively new area in the field of cultural heritage protection known as "cultural route heritage" (*wenhua luxian yichan* 文化路线遗产). It will be a fascinating study to continue to observe the process of cultural heritage protection of the Ancient Tea Horse Road in the years to come as I am sure it will reveal much concerning the politics of cultural and national identity in contemporary China.

China is at present experiencing something of a "World Heritage application rush". At the time of writing China has 38 sites listed at UNESCO as World Heritage (27 cultural, seven natural, and four mixed cultural/natural) (UNESCO China). In the cultural category these include the Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and Shenyang, The Great Wall, and Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor (Xi'an). In the natural category they include the Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries (Wolong, Siguniang and Jiajin Mountains) and the Jiuzhaigou Valley Scenic and Historic Interest Area (Sichuan). The mixed category includes famous sacred and scenic mountains areas such as Mount Emei (Sichuan) and Mount Huangshan (Anhui). Yunnan, where much of my research is focused, has three sites listed as World Heritage: The Old Town of Lijiang, the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas, and the South China Karst (notably the Stone Forest near Kunming, but this also includes the karst areas in Guilin). There are currently fifty-five sites on the tentative list (with one in Yunnan, the

Hani Terraces of Honghe). Two of these, the China Section of the Silk Road and the Grand Canal, represent the first submissions in the “cultural route heritage” category.

It therefore seems that the cultural heritage authorities in China are now making serious efforts to preserve the Ancient Tea Horse Road. In the meantime a great deal of basic research needs to be conducted in order to fully catalogue and outline the scope of the tea road across China. That is precisely the next phase of the project of preservation within which the author is actively involved. Ironically, however, acknowledgement of cultural heritage value does not amount to immediate protection. Indeed, in the rush to develop tourism some cultural heritage sites find that “protection” is a double-edged sword.

3. Tourism and Cultural Heritage Conservation in China: An Oxymoron?

Other than the intrinsic benefits of preserving cultural heritage, one of the key motivating factors leading to preservation efforts across China is the potential to develop tourism. Indeed, as Jones and Munda (2001) and Rodwell (2001) argue, the lure of the “tourism dollar” is one of the major motivating factors involved in the application frenzy for “World Heritage” status worldwide. In China, tourism, understood broadly as “economic development”, along with the international recognition conferred by World Heritage status, makes such applications very appealing to local government cadres and tourism developers. The Ancient Tea Road is no exception. Local governments and tourism business developers are eagerly eyeing the remnant tea road and historic caravan staging posts with a view to creating employment and income through tourism. And fair enough, as local communities deserve the right to develop resources in their jurisdictions. But do “mass commercial tourism” and “cultural heritage preservation” make good bedfellows? Perhaps most importantly, are we certain that local communities benefit from tourism development? That is what I explore in this section.

China has well and truly joined the age of mass domestic tourism. As household incomes increased during the course of the 1980s, and especially the 1990s and into the 2000s, more and more Chinese consumers have taken part in domestic tourism. The growth in domestic tourism, and the leisure economy more generally, over the last two decades has been phenomenal and the projections are that it will continue to expand strongly into the decades to come as China’s “leisure economy” grows and matures. Domestic tourism has been hailed as an effective means to redistribute income from the more prosperous areas of eastern China to the much less prosperous regions of western China. Following the example in other countries, in order to stimulate

domestic tourism in 2000 the Chinese authorities created two “golden week” (*huangjinzhou* 黄金周) national holiday periods (one week during the “Spring Festival” (*chunjie* 春节) which falls sometime in January/February depending on the Lunar Calendar, and one week coinciding with National Day (*guoqingjie* 国庆节) which falls on 1st October). The policy was hugely successful with over 120 million people travelling, for tourism and family reunion, in 2007.³ It would seem to be a win-win situation in which eastern China has the growing number of consumers with the disposable income and leisure time to engage in tourism and leisure activities, whilst western China has the natural scenery, cultural heritage and “exotic” ethnic minorities to constitute tourist attractions.

Domestic tourism has certainly brought many benefits in the form of employment, income generation, and the building of infrastructure (roads, railway, airports, and so on). It can also be argued that tourism in ethnic minority regions has assisted in the revival of cultural traditions as it is precisely these “traditions” that inbound tourists wish to “consume”. At the same time, however, it can also be argued that large-scale commercial tourism can be very destructive, both on the physical environment (especially in ecologically sensitive areas) and on local cultures and communities (the later in the form of drugs and prostitution, amongst other things). Some would argue, and I tend to agree in some cases, the mass tourism actually leads to a crass commercialization and distortion of local cultural traditions rather than “preservation” as the locals “reshape” and “repackage” their traditions to suit the consumptive desires and gaze of the inbound tourist.

More importantly many local communities where mass tourism is developed do not even directly benefit. Many local governments and tourism authorities prefer to work directly with tourism developers and contract out the rights to develop tourist sites without adequate consultation or involvement of local communities. John Flower (2004) in his study of roads, temples and markets in Ya’an (Sichuan), which is a major tea producing area and important point on the Sichuan-Tibet tea road, has made the following observations:

The tourist development was a joint venture between the city and township governments and a private company headquartered in Chongqing ... All revenue went to the company and state; few villagers benefited from the development. On the contrary, those living within the park’s boundaries were relocated, and villagers in the surrounding area who had previously used the area’s resources were now charged admission (which they could not afford) and were fined for grazing animals or cutting wood in the park.

(Flower, 2004: 679)

I have witnessed similar circumstances in field sites in Anhui and Yunnan, the former with regards to the “Ancient Anhui-Hangzhou Road” and the latter

the “Ancient Tea Horse Road”, and have heard this “story” repeated many times by colleagues working in the field of community development and tourism throughout China. This is not to suggest that all tourism development projects at the grass-roots level are like this. On the contrary, I have also encountered a number of fine examples of community participation and management. But unfortunately these seem to be too few. In order to challenge and change the mindset of mass commercial tourism and move towards more culturally sensitive forms of community-based sustainable tourism, I would argue we need to target the four major participants in the production and consumption of tourism, that is, government (especially local government), tourism operators and developers, local communities in the tourist zone, and the incoming tourists themselves.

We need to remember that in China the “departments” of tourism and cultural heritage protection are completely separate. The former, the China National Tourism Administration (*guojia luyouju* 国家旅游局), is much more commercially orientated and closely integrated into local and provincial plans for economic development (it also oversees, interestingly, outbound tourism from China). Whilst not quite the same rank as a full ministry, the Tourism Administration, at both central and provincial levels, has quite a bit of clout, especially with regards to the process of approving tourism plans (and therefore quite important as far as tourism business developers are concerned). It is quite clear from my interviews with tourism office officials in Anhui and Yunnan that cultural heritage protection, community participation and the potential for poverty alleviation, are not high on their list of priorities. By contrast the State Administration of Cultural Heritage is a department within the Ministry of Culture. It has much less influence and clout when compared to the tourism authorities. Agencies of cultural heritage protection at the grass-roots are underfunded and understaffed, and cannot hope to compete with local government officials concerned primarily with “economic growth”. The only silver lining is the growing interest in cultural heritage tourism and the frenzy surrounding applications for World Heritage status. But as I have noted here the danger is that cultural heritage protection will be used as a tool for commercial development rather than seeking to serve the interests of cultural heritage protection itself.

In terms of the Ancient Tea Horse Road allow me to make a few preliminary observations about the development of tea horse road cultural heritage tourism in Yunnan. Puer is the home of the famous “puer” tea. Puer is a form of tea (either “raw” or “fermented”) that is steamed and compressed into brick form thus making it conducive to storage (it keeps very well, and in many cases actually “matures” with age) and transportation. It has long been a favourite of Tibetans and it was through long-distance trade between Puer and Lahsa (over 3,000 kilometres) that one of the major routes of the “Ancient

Tea Horse Road” was created. Along this trading route are many “exotic” and “colourful” ethnic communities that have already made a major mark for themselves in terms of tourism. Of noteworthy mention are Dali, Lijiang and Shangrila.⁴ In 2007 Yunnan itself attracted 90 million domestic tourists and 2.2 million international tourists (Yunnan Province Statistical Bureau, 2008). With the growth in domestic interest both in the *chama gudaο* and in Puer tea (which went from relative obscurity in the 1990s to one of the hottest trends in tea consumption and investment in recent years) tourism authorities (government and business developers) have been keen to “develop” tourism sites and activities that link directly to the Ancient Tea Horse Road.

Puer has not been as successful as Dali, Lijiang and Shangrila in developing tourism. But there are plans to change that. Puer has developed a tourist plan which puts the focus squarely on tea and the *chama gudaο*. The county of Ninger (Ning'er Hani and Yi Autonomous County) sits within Puer (which is officially classified as a “prefectural level city”, but is still very “rural” in its nature). Ninger is marketing itself as the “birthplace of tea” and the “starting point of the Ancient Tea Horse Road” (*cha zhi yuan, dao zhi shi* 茶之源, 道之始). A tourist development plan has already been completed and it seems the first stages are in implementation. Ninger has announced that it will host the “Inaugural China Puer Ancient Tea Horse Road Festival” later this year (2010). Ninger has also developed the first “Ancient Tea Horse Road Themepark” in the village of Nakeli. Nakeli is famous for being a major staging post on the tea road. It is strategically located between Puer and Ninger. To this day it still sits on an important transport route. Standing on one section of the remnant tea road you can see National Highway 213 on one side, and further up on the hill the Kunming-Bangkok International Expressway is in the final stages of completion. Unfortunately, Nakeli is also well known for a devastating 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck the region on 3rd June 2007. Most of the village houses and buildings were damaged beyond repair and were destroyed, to be rebuilt using modern materials. At the point of the staging post (*yizhan* 驿站) nothing remains, so they have rebuilt a number of buildings in the “old style”. The feeling is distinctively “themeparkish” and one cannot help but wonder that the only real value is Nakeli’s proximity to the road network. In effect there is no “real” tangible cultural heritage in Nakeli other than a small section of cobblestone tea road which passes through fields with views of the highway and expressway on either side.

Admittedly more research needs to be conducted in Puer to establish a fuller picture of the relationship between “cultural heritage”, “tourism” and the “Ancient Tea Horse Road”. We need to better understand the role the local community in Nakeli has played in the planning and development of the village as a tourist site and also the relationship between the local county

government and tourism developers. I have only provided Nakeli here as an example of how the imperative for tourism development can override authenticity when it comes to cultural heritage preservation.

4. Conclusion

China's claim to be a living "civilization of 5000 years" will ring hollow if tangible and intangible cultural heritage continue to be lost at the current rate. Government at all levels is now mobilizing to save what is left and China is currently in the grips of a "World Heritage Application Fever". Unfortunately the desire to cash in on "World Heritage" status and develop mass commercial tourism may actually have a negative impact. Local communities also may not directly benefit from whatever "development" takes place and will be disenfranchised. The Ancient Tea Horse Road is set to be the next big item on China's "World Heritage" list. This is a cultural route of enormous significance to the many different ethnic groups in southwest China. It is also within the sights of local government and tourism developers as the next big "opportunity". I have outlined here the first stages in putting the Ancient Tea Horse Road on the path to World Heritage application and outlined some of the challenges in balancing cultural heritage preservation and tourism development. The development of the Ancient Tea Horse Road is a work in progress and will be the focus of growing research in the years to come. It affords an excellent opportunity to research the links between cultural heritage, tourism development and ethnic identity.

Notes

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- 1. Prasenjit Duara (1988) has outlined in detail the first "stages" of cultural destruction in the wake of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the transition towards a modernizing "secular-scientific" nation-state during the Republican Period.

2. Other provinces and regions could also be added but this seems to be the currently accepted parameters of the “Chinese” Ancient Tea Horse Road. Martha Avery (2003) has written an excellent account of the “tea road” as it relates to the trade in tea between China and Russia (and the peoples in between). However, other than two interesting and informative travel accounts by Jeff Fuchs (2008) and Laichung Nangsa (2007) virtually nothing of a more scholarly nature has been written in English on the Ancient Tea Horse Road.
3. There was an additional “Golden Week” beginning on May 1st (International Labour Day), but it was abolished in 2007 to make way for a number of traditional festivals to become official holidays, namely, the Mid-Autumn Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Qingming Festival. This represents another step forward in the “rediscovery” of “traditional Chinese culture”.
4. There is a growing body of research on the socioeconomic and cultural impacts of tourism in Yunnan. Some recent research includes Hillman (2003), Bai (2007), Donaldson (2007) and Mattison (2010).

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