



Yujie Zhu

# Heritage and Romantic Consumption in China

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

 International  
Institute for  
Asian Studies

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*Yujie Zhu*

Amsterdam University Press



## Publications

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## Prologue: Somewhere in Time

On 11 May 1920, Austro-American botanist, anthropologist, linguist and adventurer Joseph Rock travelled from Chiang Mai, in Thailand (then called Siam), to Lijiang, in the northwest part of China's Yunnan Province. He made the journey with caravans and his medical team. The eminent scientist had a commission from the US Department of Agriculture to collect commercial botanical specimens in that region, as he had done on previous missions to Siam and Burma. Eventually he decided to settle down in a Naxi village in Baisha township, at the foot of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, remaining there until 1949 (Yoshinaga et al. 2011: 126). He was fascinated by the natural environment and indigenous culture of the region. Over the years, Rock wrote essays and took high-quality black-and-white photographs documenting local culture and religion, which were later published in the journal of the National Geographic Society. His most influential work, *The Naxi Kingdom of Southwest China*, published in 1947, well documented the region through his photographs as, in his words, 'a magic Kingdom of wealth, scenic beauty, marvellous forests, flowers and friendly tribes.'<sup>1</sup>

Few Westerners had travelled in this region. Another was the Russian explorer and exile Peter Goullart, who had spent years in Shanghai learning Chinese and working as a tour guide before getting a position with the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (a government agency) in Sichuan and then, in 1942, Lijiang, where he remained until 1949. Like Rock, Goullart documented the life and customs of the Naxi people in the region and described the Lijiang plateau as an ancient forgotten Naxi kingdom of southwest China in his books (Goullart 1955). In the postscript of his work *Forgotten Kingdom* he wrote:

Thus, due to the political upheavals, I ended my stay, of almost nine years, in the little-known and all but forgotten ancient Naxi Kingdom of southwest China. Even during my youth spent in Moscow and Paris I had been unaccountably attracted to Asia, her vast, little-explored mountains and her strange peoples and, especially, to mysterious Tibet. The fates, stern to me in many other ways, have been kind in vouchsafing my long travels in Asia which even now, I have a feeling, are not at an end. I had

<sup>1</sup> This is a description written by Joseph Rock in his book *The Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of Southwest China*, published in 1947. This book is the very first work introducing Lijiang to Western readers.

always dreamed of finding, and living in that beautiful place, shut off from the world by its great mountains, which years later James Hilton conceived in his novel *Lost Horizon*. His hero found his 'Shangri-La' by accident, I found mine, by design and perseverance, in Likiang.

The Lijiang that Rock and Goullart documented has now become a distant memory, a hazy 'magic kingdom' of the past. These adventurers, who left together after the Communist Revolution in 1949, believed that they had stumbled upon a mythic civilization forgotten to the world. Now their own accounts have become the stuff of legend, as over the decades of revolution and then of economic reform, the town of Lijiang would go through unprecedented (and irreversible) urban, architectural, religious and social change. In particular, Rock's photographs are a valuable record of the traditional social, cultural and religious life of Lijiang as well as of the natural landscape of this region, a fact that earned him the moniker 'The Western Father of Naxi Studies.'

Rock and Goullart's stories have featured in Western documentaries, films, magazines, and books, many of which are still in print today. Backpackers have clung to them since the early 1980s, when the region was first opened to foreigners, and Western and Japanese backpackers began visiting Lijiang, keen to follow in the footsteps of Rock and Goullart. They were attracted by Lijiang's mountain scenery, narrow waterways, wildlife, relatively unspoiled traditional architecture, and unique minority culture. The 1990s witnessed an influx of international documentary makers. The documentaries – the most famous perhaps being Phil Agland's *China: Beyond the Clouds* (1994) – focused on Lijiang's breath-taking scenery and on the 'exotic' lives of the local ethnic groups (Su and Teo 2009). They portrayed the place as an ideal destination for trekking as well as a backdoor to Tibet.

Yet, why did Rock's and Goullart's books make such a splash in the Western world in the first place? In her 2006 book about ethnic tourism in Dali (a town 140 kilometres from Lijiang), *Displacing Desire: Travel and Popular Culture in China*, Beth E. Notar (2006: 25) explored the region's attraction to tourists from Europe, Australia and America.<sup>2</sup> In her view, it is deeply rooted in the 'colonial nostalgia' of generations of European explorers who attempted to 'retrace the footsteps of Marco Polo' in the late nineteenth

2 Dali has attracted scholars such as the Australian sinologist C.P. Fitzgerald, who travelled in this region in 1930. His book *The Tower of Five Glories* (1941) recorded the culture, language, religion, economy and family relations of the Minjia people of Dali. Fitzgerald's photos have also contributed to the romantic image of the area, and the 'Orient' in general.

and early twentieth centuries. Echoes of 'colonial nostalgia' pervade *Lonely Planet* guidebooks to the region, which in their stress on 'off the beaten path' destinations, give travellers the illusion that they are like the great explorers and adventures of yore.

In their writings, Rock, Goullart, and other Western adventurers in southwest China contributed to an imaginary idea of the East. Their stories, along with such classics as *Lost Horizon*, have become part of the exotic heritage of this place. Western and Japanese tourists travel to Lijiang – now a World Heritage town – in conscious homage to the likes of Rock and Goullart. They publish their impressions in blogs, journals, and websites, reinforcing the image of this peripheral region as a place of authenticity, ancientness, unbroken tradition, and untrammelled nature.

Rock and Goullart's stories, along with Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* (later a film), the documentaries, the blogs, the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks and the rest have helped to construe Lijiang as a 'stage' on which visitors can enact fantasies of exploration and discovery. The authenticity of these stories does not affect their impact on the Western imagination – and as such, they are now embraced by the state to promote the area's romantic image for purposes of tourism – to the extent that a number of Chinese as well now subscribe to the same mythology.



# 1 Introduction

It was the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, the traditional Chinese day for celebrating romance, or 16 August 2010 by the Western calendar. I was in Lijiang, watching a colourful and noisy procession led by two people dressed as majestic, white-crowned cranes. Musicians beat gongs and drums and blew on a *suona*, a Chinese double-reeded horn. An old man with a flowing white beard, wearing a yellow vest and a long red gown covered with characters for longevity embroidered in white thread waved pine twigs in his hands; whatever incantations or blessings he may have been mumbling were drowned out by the band.

In the centre of the procession three beautiful young women were riding white horses. They all wore red-and-white coats and embroidered boat-shaped shoes, and had garlands of red roses on their heads. Three handsome young men in white yak leather vests walked beside the women, leading the horses. Both men and women had a large red satin flower pinned to their chest. They waved to the crowd, and occasionally threw smiles at one another. A dozen elderly Naxi women were walking behind them, dressed in dark red wide-sleeved loose gowns, long trousers and goatskin waistcoats with seven round circles.<sup>3</sup> They carried household utensils such as bronze ware, quilts, sheets, and pillows.

When every member of the group had arrived at a courtyard in the middle of the town, the music came to a sudden stop. A girl dressed in a light blue coat with embroidered laces on her collars and sleeves started speaking in Chinese:

Welcome to the Naxi Wedding Courtyard! You are now in Lijiang, a place with a history of a thousand years and at a courtyard with a history of a hundred years. Today you will experience the utopia of love and the flavour of romance. Today is a special and happy day, because we witness the wedding ceremony of three couples. According to our Dongba script,<sup>4</sup> this month is the best in the year, and this day is the best in the month. We will introduce you to the sacred magic of the Dongba ritual. The wedding

3 The decoration of the dress means 'wearing stars and moon' which symbolizes that the Naxi women go out to their work before dawn and return home at night.

4 Local Naxi use pictographic scripts when the ritual practitioners, called Dongba, carry out their ceremonies and rituals to communicate with spirits. The Dongba script consists of drawings of men, animals, natural elements and cultural objects (Arcones 2012).

will bless the couples with everlasting happiness. The blessing will also bring happiness to all of you, our distinguished guests.

'Is it a real Naxi wedding? Or just a touristic performance?' several tourists asked the girl. I had the same question in my mind. 'Yes, it is a real wedding,' the girl answered. 'This is a sacred Naxi traditional wedding, a treasure of this World Heritage town, a culture certified by UNESCO, representing a living record of our past. Today these couples will receive the spiritual blessing from our senior Dongba. You are most welcome to join the wedding ceremony!'

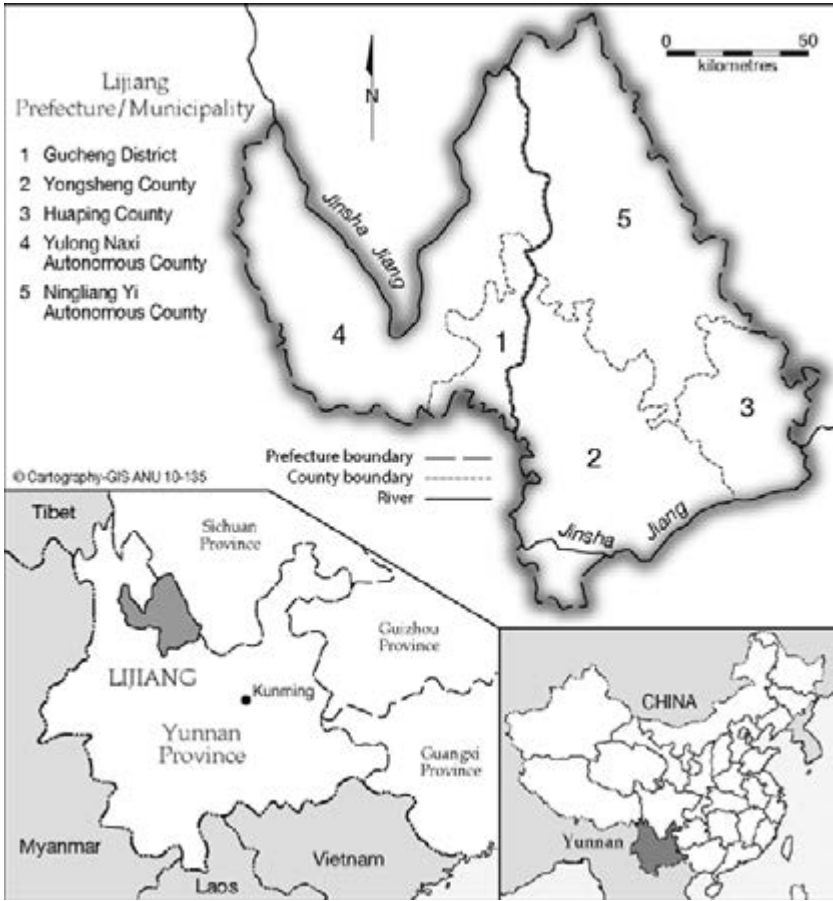
Guided by the band and the couples, the group was invited to sit around tables in the courtyard where a wedding banquet was prepared. Each guest was asked to pay 120 *yuan* (approximately 20 dollars). Attracted by the romantic image of Lijiang, I was on my fieldwork studying the impact of heritage and tourism on this place. I had happily paid for the experience of witnessing a traditional wedding ceremony of the local Naxi people. However, after I was introduced to the couples during the banquet, I soon realized that none of them were local residents at all. They all came from different places in China, including a couple from Shanghai who ran a guesthouse in town, a tourist couple from Guangdong on a honeymoon trip, and a couple who were not even really a couple! They were Han Chinese studying in the local college and had booked the service just for fun. I asked myself: 'Why has such a courtyard been created in the first place? Why do these people come here to get married and why do others come to watch?' It was with these questions in mind that I decided to embark on a journey to explore this place and its significance.

## Lijiang Old Town and the Naxi

Lijiang is a prefecture-level city in southwest China, 600 kilometres from the provincial capital of Yunnan, Kunming, not far from Laos, Burma, and Vietnam. A prefecture is one level down from province in political status; even though it is considered remote, it is not insignificant. As part of historic military and trade routes to Southeast Asia, known as the Ancient Southern Silk Road and the Ancient Tea Route, the area once earned the nickname of China's 'South Gate.' With 25 officially recognized ethnic minorities, Yunnan is the most ethnically diverse province in China.<sup>5</sup> Yet, unlike Tibet,

5 According to a recent provincial survey, more than one-third of the province's total population belongs to ethnic groups, occupying 70.2 per cent of the territory (Lijiang Bureau of Statistics 2011).

Figure 1.1 Lijiang Prefecture on two location maps in 2010



Source: CartoGis, College of Asia and Pacific, the Australian National University

Mongolia, Xinjiang and the Hui autonomous area, Yunnan has not seen much ethnic unrest since the anti-Qing Rebellion of the late nineteenth century.

This book is mainly concerned with Lijiang’s Old Town, also called Dayanzhen and one of Lijiang’s five administrative districts; Lijiang residents nickname the area around the Old Town ‘New Town.’<sup>6</sup> Lijiang is populated by

6 Lijiang has undergone a series of administrative changes: Starting off as Lijiang district (*Lijiang zhuanqu*) in 1950, Lijiang was named Naxi Autonomy County (*Lijiang naxi zizhixian*) in 1961, and promoted to Lijiang city (*Lijiang shi*) in 2002. Currently Lijiang city is divided into five parts: Lijiang’s Old Town (also called *Dayanzhen*) forming the centre of Lijiang city, Yulong Naxi Autonomous County in the west, Ninlang Yi Autonomous County in the north, Yongsheng County in the south and Huaping County in the west. Local urban and rural Lijiang residents



Naxi (Nakhi in the old spelling), the ethnic group living in the northwestern part of Yunnan Province, as well as in the southwest of Sichuan Province. According to the census in 2010 (Lijiang Bureau of Statistics 2010), over 40 per cent of Lijiang's population is Han Chinese, followed by 20 per cent Naxi, while the remaining are made up of various other minorities, such as Yi, Lisu, Bai, Pumi, and Tai.

The Old Town has long been the political, economic and cultural centre of the Naxi and other minorities' life. In Naxi language, the town was originally called *gongbenzhi*, meaning 'market and storage for rice.' Beginning in the twelfth century, the town became a trade centre and commercial market, establishing advanced leather, textile, copper and iron industries. At the peak of its commercial development in the thirteenth century, the town accommodated an estimated 100 companies and 1,200 shops from different industries. Naxi women were active in local business, while Naxi men participated in regional caravan-based trading networks for a living, extending from Lijiang to Lhasa and beyond to India. Lijiang became the administrative centre of the region in late thirteenth century when the Mu families ruled the region as local commanders (*tusi*) through a hereditary system of chieftainship. Yet, even then, it continued to preserve substantial autonomy. The Mu family maintained close relations with the emperors, resulting in Naxi areas being increasingly influenced by Chinese culture through migration and trade (Zong 2006; Yang 2009).

The region's relatively autonomous status changed in the late seventeenth century. During this time, the Qing dynasty carried out administrative reforms aimed at preventing the indigenous groups of the empire's peripheral regions from engaging in acts of rebellion or challenges against the dominion of the empire. This policy, referred to as *gaitu guiliu* (replacing the local and reverting to the mainstream),<sup>7</sup> transformed the Mu family's chieftainships into a district administration under central control. Especially after 1723, many Chinese soldiers migrated to this region and married local women, further integrating the region into the Han Chinese polity.<sup>8</sup>

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Lijiang region, like the rest of the country, went through a series of political,

started to call the area around Lijiang's Old Town, 'New Town' (*Xincheng*), indicating its difference from the Old Town.

7 *Gaitu guiliu* integrated local political systems into the imperial administration, functioning as the main strategy by the government to centralize power in local societies during the Ming-Qing period (1368-1912).

8 For a detailed discussion on the reform and its impact on the local society, please see Zong (2006).

economic, cultural and social upheavals, including the land reform and class labelling in 1951, the Anti-rightist campaign (targeting intellectuals and cadres) in 1957, and the Great Leap Forward (an economic and social campaign by the Communist Party of China) in 1958. In his autobiography, Peter Goullart witnessed a number of arrests and executions of merchants and the destruction of monasteries and temples after the communist victory (Goullart 1955; Rees 2000: 33). The chaos of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 further damaged the local economy and local culture, resulting in the shutting down of the schools and the destruction of ancient landmarks and cultural relics.

With the implementation of the open-door policy and economic reforms introduced by the post-Mao leadership in 1978, Lijiang has slowly recovered from the previous disaster by developing private business and invigorating the educational system. Lijiang County was re-opened to foreigners for travel in 1985. Since then, Lijiang has become a Mecca for foreign backpackers and, increasingly in the 1990s, for domestic tourists (Rees 2000). Since the construction of a modern airport in 1995, train lines in 2009 and a highway directly from the provincial capital in 2013, tourism in and around Lijiang's Old Town has been on the rise. The increase of ethnic tourism in Lijiang has also been driven by the mythology of an exotic and isolated land promoted by its earliest Western visitors and amplified on the pages of guidebooks like the *Lonely Planet* (Su and Teo 2009).

During my first visit to Lijiang in 2005, I witnessed the construction of many traditional-style buildings and guesthouses, cultural theme parks and museums. In alliance with real estate developers and tourism operators, governmental officials designated Lijiang a key city for domestic tourism expansion. The image of the town, which was created by early visitors to the region, as a mysterious and exotic place for Western backpackers, has been gradually transformed into a popular Chinese holiday destination, where people travel in search of romance and alternative lifestyles. As a consequence, the town has attracted millions of domestic tourists, investors and Chinese migrants.

The sudden influx of people from outside has resulted in many problems for local residents, including 'rising prices, tensions between local and migrant entrepreneurs, tensions among local ethnic groups, and an increase in prostitution and drugs' (Rees 2000: 34). Many local residents have left the Old Town and its traditional courtyard houses, moving to the new town with its modern apartment buildings. The Old Town has become an ideal destination for cultural display and ethnic tourism consumption.

The metamorphosis of Lijiang's Old Town contributes to our understanding of the contested nature of heritage and the domestic tourism industry

in the rapidly shifting urban landscape of contemporary China. What is the nature of ethnic tourism and heritage? Why does it change local society so powerfully? What insights do the social context of tourism and heritage provide? These questions have been at the very heart of this book from its inception.

## **Ethnic Tourism in China**

The first theme of the book is ethnic tourism.<sup>9</sup> Although various forms of travel have existed in China since the Tang dynasty (618-907), such activities were often limited to social elites or business merchants. They either travelled to the capital for imperial examination to become political officials, or occasionally travelled to the countryside to escape political control or to pursue spiritual self-nourishment. During the Tang and Song dynasties (618-1279), a number of literati, such as Li Bai and Du Fu, wrote poems about their official or personal journeys visiting temples or climbing mountains with family and friends (Nyiri 2006; Strassberg 1994). Such travel, mainly by scholar-officials and cultural celebrities, was associated with certain forms of 'civilized modernity,' which showed the moral superiority of elite travellers compared to the average Chinese population (Oakes and Sutton 2010: 11).

After the government of the People's Republic of China was formed from 1949 to 1978, tourism became a form of special political activity to 'enhance China's political influence and propagate the achievements of socialist reconstruction' – an activity organized for foreign diplomats with permission to visit China under strict surveillance (Sang 2009; Sofield and Li 1998). Self-funded domestic tourism hardly existed, and outbound travel was limited to diplomats and important government officials at public expense. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), tourism was considered to be a reflection of a capitalist bourgeois lifestyle and was therefore largely shunned, although a number of Chinese youth (the Red Guards) frequently visited places with historic significance for Chinese

9 Ethnic tourism was first defined by Valene Smith (1977: 2) as a form of tourism that 'is marketed to the public in terms of the 'quaint' customs of indigenous and other exotic people, exemplified by the case studies on Eskimo, the San Blas Indians of Panama and the Toraja in Indonesia.' Under the broader umbrella of tourism, ethnic tourism often shares similar meanings with aboriginal tourism (Mercer 1994) and indigenous tourism (Ryan and Aicken 2005), although they involve different people and cultures. For a detailed discussion on ethnic tourism, please see MacCannell (1984).

Communism, with a similar spirit as red tourism today. They travel around the country to ‘exchange experience, destroy feudal sites, and visit sites of Red Army history’ (Oakes and Sutton 2010: 11).

Tourism has only become popular in China since the 1970s as an economic activity to enhance foreign exchange and accelerate the circulation of domestic currency. In July 1979, some months after China had initiated policies of economic reform, the party leader Deng Xiaoping had a three-day holiday at Yellow Mountain. During his stay, Deng encouraged transforming the tourism industry from a political activity to an economic enterprise (Sang 2009). Following his speech, the Heritage Conservation Act in 1982 and the first National Conference on Domestic Tourism in 1987 turned tourism into an appropriate form of economic development in which cultural heritage (previously presented as ‘backward and anti-socialistic’) served as a valuable resource to restore national unity (Sofield and Li 1998; Airey and Chong 2011). Several policies were issued to encourage Chinese citizens to travel domestically as a means of stimulating consumption. These policies resulted in the development of thousands of heritage sites, scenic spots and theme parks, the establishment in 1995 of a nationwide five-day working week (as opposed to the former six-day working week) and of national holidays associated with traditional Chinese festivals.

Both domestic and international tourists are drawn to China’s southwest region due to its natural scenery and unique ethnic culture. In Chinese, ‘ethnic’ refers to *minzu*, a term linked with the idea of nation in the late nineteenth century. It was first used to refer to the Han majority, as opposed to the other minority groups.<sup>10</sup> Yet, under the Chinese Communist Party, the meaning of the term *minzu* shifted from the discourse of nationalism to concepts of ethnicity and identity, rooted in shared social traits and histories (Zhang 1997; Chio 2014: 26).

In the 1950s, the Chinese government initiated a national project of ethnic classification (*minzu shibie*). Rooted in Marxist-Leninist theory and

10 In the late nineteenth century, *minzu*, a translation from the Japanese term *minzoku*, was gradually been linked to the idea of a nation, especially in the writings of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. Since the twentieth century, the idea of *minzu* has commonly been integrated into the Chinese notion of nationalism (*minzu zhuyi*), particularly when Sun Yat-sen, the father of new Chinese Republic, attempted to use ethnic policies to unify Chinese people by classifying the country into Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui and Tibetan territories in 1921. The Chinese Communist Party government later continued this approach to unite the Chinese state as a national body (*guoti*).

the past experience of the USSR,<sup>11</sup> Chinese policies of ethnic categorization were considered to be ‘discursive creations rather than reflections of organic realities’ (Chio 2014: 7). The project classified more than 400 self-identified ethnic people into 55 *shaoshu minzu*, which can be translated as ‘minority nationalities’ (Harrell 1995).<sup>12</sup> Each group ranges from a few thousand to several million people, who reside predominately in frontier lands of strategic significance, particularly in Yunnan, Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, constituting 60 per cent of China’s land. These areas are often undeveloped regions with abundant natural resources or strategic international borders, and are thus important for geopolitical security (Swain 1990).

Nowadays, 92 per cent of its nearly 1.4 billion people are officially classified as Han Chinese, while the remaining 114 million people belong to one of the 55 ethnic groups (Leibold 2013: 2). Due to the overwhelming percentage of the Han majority, the Chinese Communist Party under Mao developed the system of ethnic autonomous regions and a series of special rights for the non-Han Chinese population.<sup>13</sup> Some ethnic groups, especially those in the southwest China, have greatly benefited from these policies while others (like the Uyghur and Tibetan communities) fail to develop a sense of national belonging.

As in other multi-ethnic countries, management of ethnic relations in China has always been the priority of the party-state. China’s policy towards its ethnic populations has been described as a domestic ‘civilizing project,’ in which the state views its ethnic minorities as ‘in need of civilization’ (Harrell 1995: 13). Ethnic policies serve the political goal of social security, national integration, and political stability (Gladney 1994).

In post-Mao China, the party-state finds that ethnic tourism is significant for state-guided inter-ethnic integration. Similar to other countries in Asia, Chinese central and local governments function as ‘planners of tourist development, as marketer of cultural meanings, and as arbiter of cultural practices displayed to tourists’ (Wood 1984: 353). They define, regulate, and develop the ethnic tourism industry to facilitate the cultivation of

11 Stalin defined nationality as people sharing a common language, territory, economic life and psychological disposition; the identification of ethnic minorities as such links them to a singular historical narrative of socialist progress (Chio 2014: 32; Gladney 1994; Mullaney 2004).

12 The official identification of 55 national minority groups is the result of a contest between them. In the early 1950s, the government asked over 400 ethnic groups to claim official recognition as ‘minority nationalities’ (*shaoshu minzu*) at their local authorities. More than 700 scholars and college students then participated in this nationwide ethnographic and linguistic survey, writing numerous monographs on their findings. These monographs were used to support the official selection of the 55 national minorities.

13 Special rights include regional subsidies, special tax breaks, and educational policies such as extra points added to the score on the national entrance exam.

ethnic identity while integrating ethnic groups into the state economy. In cooperation with tourism operators and entrepreneurs, local governments often establish various stereotypes of ethnic people to satisfy tourists' imagination and curiosity (Blum 2001). Numerous published volumes and local gazetteers (*difangzhi*) on ethnic minorities written by Han anthropologists and officials establish 'an ethnocentric hierarchy' that supports state policy (Davis 2005: 19).

Using the concepts of 'internal colonialism' or 'internal orientalism,' scholars often emphasize the power asymmetries between the core and periphery – symbolizing the Han Chinese majority and the ethnic minorities – in ethnic politics in China. These asymmetries result in a continuing exoticization of minority culture (Oakes 1998; Harrell 1995). Louis Schein (1997), for example, showed how ethnic tourism in Guizhou has produced an 'internal otherness' through exoticization and self-objectification.

On the one hand, these stereotypes are similar: Han Chinese as modern and civilized and ethnic people as backward, feminine and exotic (Gladney 1994; Diamond 1988). Such classification legitimizes the state ideology of Marxism and its 'stages of history' approach in which ethnic groups are often portrayed as 'living fossils' (Oakes 1993: 54). This seems logical because ethnic minority people remain in a position socially, economically, and politically inferior to the majority Han Chinese who control the resources and tourism activities in their areas (Swain 1989; Xie 2003). Prerevolutionary Tibetan society is typically identified as 'feudal,' for example, and Chinese anthropologist Yan Ruxian (1984: 81) has suggested that the Naxi's family system and their customs serve as a 'basis for a comparative study of the history of the family.' On the other hand, each group is distinctive: the Miao are singers and drinkers; the Dai are often framed as slender and romantic; and the Naxi, whom the Han consider both civilized and harmless, are portrayed as knowledgeable and talented (Blum 2001: 13).

These stereotypes are promoted to both foreign and, since domestic tourism began in 1980s, to Chinese tourists as well. A self-other relationship between Han Chinese and minority groups has been created to motivate Chinese Han to travel around the country and seek the 'backward' and 'exotic' others within their own nation (Zhu, Jin, and Graburn 2017). Visiting these ethnic minorities can be an act of curiosity and offers a form of exotic travel that doesn't require tourists to leave China. Foreign tourists are not exempt from the Orientalist pull of the exotic 'Other': minorities represent the 'authentic,' 'native' or 'off-the-beaten-track part of China.' For both foreign and domestic tourists, ethnic people and their cultures become a 'living spectacle' to be photographed and observed (Yang and Wall 2009a).

Yet, the government isn't the only party engaged in the formation of ethnic identity, culture, and history – in fact, it is a collaboration (conscious or not) with scholars, local religious practitioners, and, of course, the 'explorer' writers of the past and present (Litzinger 2000). Ethnic groups actively participate in shaping the local tourism industry to enhance their benefits (Yang and Wall 2009b). They show remarkable resourcefulness in utilizing tourism to preserve and revive their culture while strengthening their ethnic identities (Hansen 1999; Swain 1989; Tapp 2014). Market-driven tourism celebrates ethnic culture in the form of restaurants, markets, museums, theme parks and performances.

Members of ethnic minority groups in China generally embrace the economic prosperity that comes from ethnic tourism. The intensive encounter with both international and domestic tourists, their Sinicized education and mass media motivates some members of ethnic minority groups, especially the young, to become 'modern' like tourists. To be modern means that they can live in urban flats, dress in fashionable clothes, and sing popular songs.

However, as Dean MacCannell (1976) pointed out in his seminal work *The Tourist*, such self-determination in the tourism industry is linked to a state-led discourse of exoticization. Tourists' demands for 'authentic' ethnic culture urge them to remain an 'exotic Other,' even primitive in dress and customs to suit an imaginary of being 'premodern' (Walsh and Swain 2004). This dissonance between tourists' expectations and local desires results in a fluid and multifaceted ethnic identity. To the performers I met in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, wearing ethnic dress while singing and dancing is only part of their work. Their daily life is similar to that of most Han Chinese youth in the cities: they drink Coca-Cola, make friends on the Internet, and dream of going on vacation to Paris.

## Cultural Heritage in China

The second theme of the book concerns cultural heritage in China. The concept of 'cultural heritage' – *wenhua yichan* – did not exist in Chinese until the late 1980s. Before the introduction of the Western ideology of architectural conservation, China appeared to demonstrate 'a curious neglect or indifference (even at times downright iconoclasm) towards the material heritage of the past' (Ryckmans 2008). While in the West, antiquity and heritage is present in objects and monuments from the Parthenon to Philadelphia's Liberty Bell, architectural conservation is practically absent in China, partially because of wars and natural disasters and a tendency to construct in wood



rather than stone, but also because of a different attitude towards the need for enduring monuments (Mote 1973; Botz-Bornstein 2012). Chinese buildings have an ‘in-built obsolescence,’ meaning that the material decays rapidly and requires frequent rebuilding (Victor Segalen cited in Ryckmans 2008). The rooted wooden parts need to be replaced so that buildings are constantly regenerated. New dynasties often destroyed the palaces of the previous dynasty: when the Ming came to power by vanquishing the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368, for example, it completely destroyed the palace and city that Kublai Khan had built and Marco Polo had called one of the most magnificent in the world. As a result, China has witnessed a historical continuation of periodic destruction of the material heritage of the past.

Yet, the idea of preserving ancient objects and nostalgia was not new to China: emperors (such as Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty) were prodigious collectors of objects d’art, and built magnificent gardens and palaces in which to house them that were not intended to go to ruin, whatever their eventual fate. Emperors often aligned themselves with the imperial collection using it as a symbolic manifestation of power and authority to create a continuity between their rule and previous dynasties (Elliott and Shambaugh 2005). Wealthy Chinese families also cherish heirlooms, and the culture generally reveres ancient objects and texts. Yet on the whole, Chinese civilization is transmitted through the learning of these texts, passing on the culture and the structures of social, cultural and political life that have endured in an evolving form for centuries while acquiring spiritual meaning (Ryckmans 2008; Mote 1973).

The traditional Chinese attitude towards heritage dramatically changed in the early twentieth century. At this time, Chinese architects and archaeologists expressed a Western-inspired interest in architectural heritage, which led to a cultural movement of heritage conservation and restoration (Zhu 2009).<sup>14</sup> Liang Sicheng (1901-1972), one of the pioneers of architectural conservation, returned to China with his architect-trained wife Lin Huiyin (1904-1955) after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in the 1920s. Adopting the methodology of Western architectural history, Liang and Lin introduced the Western notion of ‘authenticity’ to China. They thought old buildings should remain ‘old,’ in terms of what they called the principle of *zhengjiurujiu* (preserving or restoring the original state) (Lai, Demas and Agnew 2004).

14 In the 1930s, Zhu Qiqian (1871-1964) founded the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture (*Zhongguo yingzao xueshe*), the first academic institution for the conservation and restoration of historic architecture.



Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Communist Party-led government promoted nation-building through domestic economic development and alliances with other socialist nations. The government led by Mao Zedong endeavoured to establish a unified socialist culture, a culture that sought to align itself with scientific, democratic, and revolutionary ideals. On 1 June 1966, Chinese customs, culture, habits and ideas of the past (labelled the 'four olds') was officially described in a *People's Daily* editorial as 'monsters and demons' that 'have poisoned the minds of the people for thousands of years.' Under Mao's pursuit of 'totalistic iconoclasm' during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), all Chinese traditional culture (not just that of ethnic minorities) was ruthlessly suppressed (Wang 2010).<sup>15</sup> Fired-up youth in the revolutionary Red Guards rampaged across the country destroying temples, palaces and monuments, as well as many ancient books and artworks, although Premier Zhou Enlai managed to protect some sites (including the Forbidden City) and the most valuable artwork taken from individual collections (Elliott and Shambaugh 2005: 126).

The post-Mao leadership under Deng Xiaoping began the process of reconstruction and cultural revitalization (Wang 2013). In 1982, the country promulgated the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics. The State Bureau of Cultural Relics, later renamed as the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), is responsible for protecting over 500,000 immovable sites and relics, including a list of Major Historical and Cultural Sites Protected at the National Level, such as the Forbidden City, the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, the Peking Man site at Zhoukoudian, and the Great Wall. These sites not only showcase a rising nation with a rich civilization but also create an imaginary of Han-centred national coherence through the inclusion and exclusion of particular heritage narratives and objectives. Particularly in minority areas, heritage conservation is presented as 'a national project of unity' (Shepherd and Yu 2013: 28). The descriptions of the Potala Palace in Lhasa of Tibet, the archaeological site at Xanadu presented as the Mongolian capital established by Kublai Khan, and the Old Town of Lijiang have all been similarly re-interpreted as sites of long term collaboration between Han Chinese and minorities.

In 2017, 32 years after joining the World Cultural Heritage Convention, China has 52 sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List, second only to Italy.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a cultural movement that imposed Maoist orthodoxy and sought to remove all capitalist and feudalistic elements from Chinese society.

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, established as a division of the United Nations in 1947, was a significant step in institutional development for the protection

Accordingly, this participation in the global cultural heritage discourse generates a form of soft power on the global stage, while also becoming a domestic instrument of governance and regulation, as well as a resource for spurring local economic development.<sup>17</sup> As the main heritage authority in China, SACH is responsible for heritage nomination and managing its exploitation. Since 2004, all conservation and heritage-related activities at national and provincial levels must follow a process of approval, planning and conservation. Central and regional governments benefit from the management of heritage both politically (it bolsters their legitimacy) and economically (it promotes tourism and thus prosperity).

Since the start of the twenty-first century, in alliance with heritage experts, local governments have facilitated urban renewal of historic cities for the purpose of city branding and theming (Zhang 2006). While Hangzhou is linked to the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) and its capital Lin'an, Xi'an is associated with the Tang dynasty (618-907). Whereas Beijing is related to the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1912), Luoyang is identified with the Wei-Jin period (220-589) and Nanjing has a history as a capital of failed dynasties and governments. In addition to historical imaginaries of capitals, the 'semi-colonial era' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is linked to images of old Beijing, old Shanghai, and old Tianjin.

Historic cities in China are often reconstructed in order to promote tourism by creating updated, clean buildings and neighbourhoods which reference the ancient architecture, streets and culture they supplant in a way that is marketable to tourists. There is a glaring contradiction in demolishing heritage sites and original buildings considered dirty or shambolic in order to create neighbourhoods designed for heritage tourism that simply reference the area's material heritage with no intention of replicating the function of the old neighbourhood, their buildings and culture. An example of this is the tearing down of Beijing's centuries old commercial and artisanal Qianmen neighbourhood in order to build a sanitized, theme park 'shopping street'

of cultural heritage. UNESCO launched its first international safeguarding campaign in 1959 to save the Abu Simbel and Philae temples in the Nile valley from destruction caused by the Aswan High Dam. The success of this effort inspired additional campaigns to rescue Venice from a flood in 1965 and the Buddhist Temple of Borobudur (Indonesia) in 1972, and to protect the archaeological ruins at Mohenjo-Daro (Pakistan) in 1974. This success led UNESCO to develop the World Heritage Convention in 1972 with the support from other international organizations. The convention is the foundational document of the contemporary world heritage movement and stipulates that 'the international community as a whole [is] to participate in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage' (UNESCO 1972, 1).

17 For a detailed discussion on the various roles of cultural heritage in China, please see Fiskesjö 2010; Svensson 2006; Oakes 1998; Nyíri 2006.

complete with a Zara and a Starbucks. This strategy echoes Sinologist Wang Gungwu's (1985) observation concerning Chinese views on the recent and ancient past. Compared to the recent past, which implicates the Communist Party in violence and the destruction of heritage, so Wang argues, the ancient past is more attractive, loveable, and safe.

Yet when this romantic construction of the ancient past as a safe and idyllic place involves the material reconstruction or repurposing of communities situated within heritage sites, cultural heritage often becomes a mechanism that legitimizes social stratification, gentrification, and displacement. The process of reconstruction transforms areas into sites for tourist consumption, areas where local communities once lived, practiced their customs and carried out traditional rituals. These situations do not arise passively from global and national ideas of heritage, but from competing value systems in a time of social and economic transition.

## Romantic Consumption

This book investigates where and how heritage and tourism practices are produced, negotiated, and experienced. Taking the Naxi Wedding Courtyard in Lijiang as my primary case study, I will explore how the state, the tourism industry (primarily domestic) and certain popular modes of consumption bring about the commercialization of heritage in a way that reflects a general longing to consume the romantic in contemporary Chinese society.

The notion of romantic consumption I use here does not refer to the European Romanticism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was an intellectual, artistic and cultural reaction to, in part, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of scientific rationalism. Despite similarities in ways of thinking about the dichotomies of self and other, culture and nature, and city and country, European Romanticism arose from a particular historical context. My use of 'romantic' is based in the social, cultural, and economic contexts of a modernizing and urbanizing China. This includes the fact that China is a state ruled by a Communist Party with specific policies concerning ethnic minorities that are based both in politics and economic thinking, as well as concerning the cultural heritage and the tourism industry.

The 'romantic' of 'romantic consumption' includes but is not limited to the notion of romantic love as promoted in magazines, advertisements and the entertainment industry – a concept heavily influenced by imported Western ideas of Valentine's Day, white weddings and red roses, none of which were part of Chinese traditional culture, though adopted by some

urban elites in places like prerevolutionary Shanghai. My story of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard and tourism consumption of ethnic heritage in Lijiang is definitely related to such an understanding of romance. What I mean by 'romantic consumption,' however, extends beyond romantic feelings and love. As I will illustrate in the following chapters, it refers to individual desire, pleasure seeking and the motivation of consumption (Illouz 1997). In addition, the idea of 'consumption' is not limited to commodities but encompasses experiences such as touristic ones: the experience is the goal.

Colin Campbell, in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism* (1987), suggests that modern consumption is a phenomenon of imaginative, autonomous and self-illusory hedonism. It is different from traditional hedonism based on need and satisfaction. Modern hedonism, in Campbell's argument, is a process of 'emotional management.' In other words, the modern attitude of longing is triggered by dissatisfaction with real life and eagerness to indulge in new experiences of pleasure. Campbell proposes that it is the power of imagination, emotional engagement and control, and a redirection to new behaviour that lies at the heart of modern consumption practices.

Inspired by Campbell, the anthropologist Nicholas Tapp (2008: 458) has proposed that in China there is a 'romanticism' that involves 'the sense of inwardness, an aspiration to the sublime, a restive dissatisfaction with normalcy and the mundane, an interest in the spiritual and aesthetic, a searching out of the extraordinary, perhaps a rage against conventional norms and sometimes a recklessness, a heedlessness of the self and its body.' Such a 'romantic spirit,' Tapp writes, can be traced back to early Daoism and the notion of nature (*ziran*) developed during the second to the fourth century when Daoists, opposed to the Confucianists, searched for and settled in romanticized minority regions. Similarly, Michael Griffiths et al. (2010) argue that in the post-Mao era, Chinese urban elites have pursued a notion of the 'authentic self' through eating, dressing and seeking out experiences that connect them to an imagined rural 'Other.'

Why do practices of romantic consumption emerge in modern China? Following Tapp, and Griffiths et al., I argue that such a movement needs to be understood within the context of the post-Mao economic reform and modernization. Romantic consumption in China results from social transformations embedded in interactions between urban and rural populations, the state and the individual, as well as tradition and modernity. I focus on three factors that foster the development of romantic consumption.

Firstly, romantic consumption is deeply rooted in an emergent and self-conscious individualism. During Maoist times, there was a huge emphasis

on collective life; decisions, including who one could marry or when one could have a child, were not entirely one's own. Even decisions as to what to wear were conditioned and determined by society and politics.

Today, society offers its people many choices and channels through which they can pursue personal happiness and their dreams of a modern lifestyle. As a result, Chinese individuals have the awareness and capacity to choose their own life path and forge an individual entity (Yan 2010). The privatization of business online media (Zhang and Ong 2008; MacKinnon 2008), social liberalization, and wider tolerance of sexual love between unmarried partners have all contributed to this trend (Rofel 2007). Romantic consumption is in a sense the marketization of these liberated individual desires and pleasures.

Secondly, in the Chinese urban sphere, material consumption and expenditure patterns have changed dramatically: simply put, savings have been replaced by consumption (Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson 2013). Today, as is the trend globally, people prefer to purchase services instead of goods, though in China some of this is due to a corruption-related crackdown that can make the owning and display of luxury goods problematic. Depending on priorities, age and inclination, people may be spending more on family rituals that are associated with birthdays, marriages and funerals, clubbing or travel (Farrer 2008).

Thirdly, the discourse of happiness has also shifted from emphasizing external factors (such as money, housing and cars) to affective and emotional experiences. According to an annual survey by *Oriental Outlook* magazine and the National Bureau of Statistics, which polled 13.95 million people across the country, most economically powerful cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are not listed as the happiest places in China. People's main concern, as part of the outcome of cities' complex and rapid transformation, are issues relating to air quality, the costs of living and food safety. Prosperity improves public goods, technology, infrastructure and transportation, but can also lead to the loss of traditional social networks, especially those related to kinship and family – it's now rare to find in Chinese cities what was once a Chinese ideal, that of four generations living under one roof. The consumer revolution that prosperity has brought to urban areas often lead to disappointment and fragile satisfaction as Chinese consumers have discovered what ones in countries like the US and UK did back in their own eras of post-war prosperity (Beck 1992): money can't buy happiness.

As a consequence of the above three factors, the contemporary Chinese pursuit of individual happiness has become experience-oriented, self-directed, and can be creative and adventurous. The dissatisfaction with

mundane urban existence leads to a romanticized interest in the natural, spiritual and aesthetic – and a tendency to invest the ‘ethnic’ with these qualities. This romanticization drives portions of the urban populations into a search for tradition and authenticity. People on such a quest seek to assert their individuality and create a unique identity through travel, leisure and even migration. Now that the focus has shifted from making a living to lifestyle, such activities are channels for individual Chinese to escape from their daily routines and to negotiate between realities and dreams.

### **Authenticity, Authentication, and Customization**

Romantic consumption helps explain why Chinese tourists are so attracted to cultural heritage and ethnic tourism; in this book, I also inquire into the sociocultural impact of romantic consumption on both local people and Chinese tourists. This brings me to my second major issue: ‘authenticity.’

‘Authenticity,’ the term, has its origin in Greek and Latin, where it was understood as meaning ‘authoritative’ and ‘original.’ In the European Middle Ages, it acquired notions that ranged from political authority, the efficacy of magic and the origin of religious texts (Comaroff and Roberts 1986). In the realm of museums, it indicates ‘whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be’ (Trilling 1972: 93). Authenticity today refers to notions of the genuine, the real, and the unique (Reisinger and Steiner 2006), and is common to the fields of ethics, linguistics, material culture and arts.

Tourism is often motivated by the search for a supposedly more authentic society and culture than the one in which the tourists live. The idea that urban societies are somehow inauthentic creates a longing for the past, imbuing places that have preserved their traditional heritage with a romantic aura (Gable and Handler 1996). However, the commodification of cultural heritage through tourism leads to the recreation of heritage as performance or ‘pseudo-events’ (Boorstin 1992).

In today’s world of globalization, culture is constantly changing and reformulating. What may appear untainted and authentic custom may in fact be quite different from what it was before encounters with the likes of Rock and Goullart, colonization or mass migrations in Lijiang. We need to ask, of course, whether the concept of authenticity is still relevant or meaningful.

In recent years, sociologists and anthropologists have pushed forward theories and debates that emphasize the social construction of authenticity over the use of scientific criteria such as materiality and the notion of ‘origin.’ As a result of postmodernist, poststructuralist and constructivist

theories, the once unchallenged notion that authenticity refers to the actual, true, genuine or essentialist is increasingly under question (Bruner 1994; Reisinger and Steiner 2006). Today, authenticity is regarded as a fluid and constantly negotiated concept (Squire 1994; Hughes 1995). The notion can also refer to tourists' beliefs, expectations and stereotyped images (Wang 1999; Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart 2008).

Whereas authenticity used to be analysed as a concept, more recent studies have shifted the focus to the underlying dynamic processes of authentication (Ateljevic and Doorne 2005; Cohen and Cohen 2012). In *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism*, Feifan Xie (2011), for instance, brings our attention to the power relations behind the establishment of authenticity. Instead of inquiring 'What is authentic?' in ethnic culture in China, Xie (2011) asks 'How does it work?' and 'Who is involved?' Based on scientific knowledge, government authorities often have the power to officially recognize and certify a heritage site as well as an object or event as being 'original,' 'genuine,' 'real,' or 'trustworthy' (Selwyn 1996: 26).

In discussions about authenticity, scholars are also switching focus from the nature of objects to the global effects of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention on local traditions, cultural practices, and daily life (Smith 2006). International heritage policies and conventions have redefined the meaning of culture through the application of particular types of language and ethical precepts pertaining to authenticity. As Michael Herzfeld (2004) has argued, this 'global hierarchy of values,' historically disseminated by European colonial powers, views local heritage through the lens of political dominance and assumed cultural superiority. In this process, the authorized heritage discourse has produced new norms and standards concerning what are considered to be good, beautiful and appropriate (Smith 2006). As it is the nation states who produce and disseminate this discourse, the value system becomes a formidable 'tool of governance' in constructing 'identity, experiences, and social standing[s]' (Smith 2006: 52; Kipnis 2012).

But it is not only global agencies and government authorities that have the power to declare and certify what is authentic cultural heritage. Tourism service providers are also involved, for better or worse, even when they knowingly stage a display of faked-up or compromised heritage and market it as authentic in order to satisfy the imagination and desires of tourists (Salazar and Graburn 2014; Boniface and Fowler 1993; Zhu 2017).

Studying how Lijiang guesthouses ran their businesses, anthropologist Wang Yu (2007) describes how the hosts have created a 'customized authenticity' that suits tourists' imagination of how people live in Lijiang. More importantly, tourists also play a 'positive and proactive role' in the



process of homemaking since the hosts modify their houses simply by reacting to their customers (Wang 2007: 801). In other words, customized authenticity is an on-going process of co-production through strategizing, revision and re-adaptation.

This book moves beyond Wang's argument of customized authenticity to clarify the sociocultural consequences of heritage in the context of tourism by examining how heritage customization influences local communities and tourists. For the local community, on the one hand, the customization of cultural heritage results in the creation of a romanticized past represented through colourful and 'exotic' dresses, music and spectacle. As I will illustrate in Chapter 4 (Local actors), to suit tourist tastes, the culture of minority peoples has been fossilized in exhibitions that do not acknowledge the fact that like all cultures, it is constantly evolving (Gladney 1994). Since local state and tourism operators are typically in control of how heritage is 'customized' for tourists, the local community has become an 'actor' instead of an 'owner' of their cultural heritage. The 'emergent meanings' in such performance, as Erik Cohen (1988) proposed, can only exist as a vehicle of self-representation for an external public.

Tourists enjoy watching ethnic dance performances even though these heritage products are commercially designed and provided by tourism operators and marketing agencies (Xie 2011). However, as I will illustrate in Chapter 5 (Guests) and Chapter 6 (After the Show), tourists can only ever be 'guests': they can take part in these customized rituals, but romantic consumption doesn't allow them to become part of the community from which the rituals are borrowed. The hedonistic nature of ethnic and heritage tourism only offers them a kind of instant, albeit powerful gratification. As one tourist to Lijiang told me, 'I got married in a Naxi ceremony. I am well-travelled and have absorbed something exotic into my identity.' This type of response typifies tourists' experiences which can be generally categorised as a form of self-illusory hedonism – an imaginative pleasure, a temporary escape from reality, part, perhaps of a continuous pursuit of individual identity.

## **Why the Naxi Wedding Courtyard?**

This book examines heritage and romantic consumption in China. Why does this case study of Lijiang and the Naxi Wedding Courtyard matter? Why is the story of the courtyard worthy of being the subject of a book? As I will show, the impact of heritage and ethnic tourism on contemporary



Chinese society reflects significant sociocultural processes that take place not only in China but also all over the world today.

In the twenty-first century, various forms of mobility, such as migration, tourism, or diaspora, have become the dominant mechanism of everyday life of the world. Modern society allows us to move around to fulfil our various needs. Most studies predict that global tourism will strongly increase over the next ten years, with the number of people travelling abroad or within their own countries doubling. According to projections by 2020, there will be more than 1.2 billion annual interregional arrivals and 378 million long-haul travellers all over the world (WTTC 2011: 27; WTO 2001). Tourism will without doubt have an immense impact on the global cultural landscape.

The story of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard offers a concentrated view of the unfolding interaction between modernity and tradition, the urban and the rural, as well as the desire and dreams of consumption in the world today. Because the Old Town of Lijiang, as a World Heritage Site, is closely linked to the global World Heritage regime and related tourism, this book examines the friction that arises when the global meets the local in regard to ethical issues such as land ownership, dramatic changes of lifestyle, the moral implications of romantic consumption, and the question of who has the power to own and interpret cultural heritage.

The 'on-the-ground' approach illuminates a complex and vivid picture of the interactions in this specific locality between people's relationship with the past, their desire to change themselves, and their visions for the future – I look at both tourists and the local community through these lenses. As a tourist attraction, it essentially functions as a stage where cultural tradition is performed rather than lives. People come to it from different walks of life and different motivations. It is also a place where new social relationships unfold and evolve. They are not always desirable relationships. They can involve mutual neglect and disrespect, cutthroat commercial competition, and the resistance to state control of cultural heritage.

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard and Lijiang are, of course, not unique in the issues they present and the problems they face. By tracing the rise of the heritage tourism industry and its interrelation with modern consumption throughout the twentieth century, John Urry in his 2002 book *The Tourist Gaze* finds that the globalization of heritage through tourism has resulted in a greater scale of romanticization and commercialization of culture worldwide, including in the United States and Europe. What's more, international organizations concerned with heritage preservation are increasingly aware of past mistakes in which physical heritage protection and tourism promotion have been overemphasized at the expense of attention to the living practices

and knowledge of local peoples. As the story of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard illustrates, the pressure of commercial tourism can also cause cultural homogenization and the destruction of local uniqueness. Such process often refers to a whole set of complex issues such as authenticity, heritage interpretation, and social exclusion (McKercher and Du Cros 2002; Timothy and Prideaux 2004). The protection, conservation, interpretation, and representation of cultural heritage is not just an issue for global institutions, local governments or the scholarly community – it is an important challenge for us all.

### **A Note on the Method**

As a Han Chinese researcher studying the interaction between the ethnic and Chinese people in minority area of China, I consider myself both insider/outsider, while taking a position at the margins. Such position is described as 'between familiarity and strangeness' and as 'living simultaneously in two worlds, that of participation and that of research' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 112). I hope to negotiate the insider/outsider position in a way that allows my own subjectivity and reflexivity to generate knowledge that reflects social reality without disregarding my marginal position. There is no such thing as absolute neutrality and objectivity in the world. However, the ethnographic study helps me to describe and illustrate what is happening, who is involved in this transition, and what the relationship is between the various players.

I conducted research over seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork (May to November 2006, July to December 2010 and June to September 2011) in Lijiang.<sup>18</sup> It was in 2010 that I realized that the Naxi Wedding Courtyard was an ideal place for studying cultural encounters, human behaviour with regard to the romantic consumption of heritage, and the power relations that inform social change and cultural transformation in China. I have participated in and observed all sorts of activities, including meetings, preparations, wedding ceremonies, and banquets.

18 Between 2006 and 2010, I visited Lijiang on average once a year, staying from four days to one month. I used different ethnographic methods during my field research to interact socially with the local community, the authorities, and domestic tourists. In 2006, I worked in a local heritage management office as a consultant, where I conducted interviews with heritage officials. My interviews concerned the status quo of the heritage site, the officials' understanding of heritage, conflicts arising due to the tension between economic development and conservation, and their vision of the future. These interviews offered me the primary data that is essential for accessing the complexities of the site's heritage governance.

When I first began interviewing local actors in the courtyard, I was inspired by the reflexive ethnography work, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* by Marjorie Shostak (1981), which combined participant observations and the telling of the life story of a 'primitive' African woman in her own words. I use oral histories to delve deeper into individual stories and to illustrate how local actors see their roles in the performance in the courtyard and, following intensive autobiographical interviews, present a continuous narrative of their lives.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, through ethnographic research into tourists' experiences and attitudes towards these cultural performances, I documented their views on their engagement with the weddings in the courtyard – whether gazing, photographing, participating, listening or sharing their perceptions. However, I soon realized that studying the domestic tourists' motivation behind visiting Lijiang and the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is a challenging task, because their experience in the courtyard lasts only for a couple of hours. My observation therefore extended to nearby guesthouses, restaurants, teahouses, bars, markets, and souvenir shops.<sup>20</sup> I also traced the daily life of several Han Chinese couples each time when I returned to Lijiang from 2007 to 2011; during that time period, some of them were married in the courtyard, had children, started new businesses, or departed from Lijiang. Such a long-term observation allowed me to understand the impacts of heritage and tourism on various stages of their journey, which was filled with a mixture of happiness, obsession, hope and sometimes, frustration.

## Theatre of the Book

This book is structured as a theatrical production. My approach of studying heritage and ethnic tourism through the lens of theatre is both metaphorical

19 In the book version of this research, the names of all informants are pseudonyms but the names of public figures have not been changed. Personal information in the interviews and personal blogs have been omitted to protect the privacy of the informants. Most interviews were carried out in spontaneous exchanges, because the settings for the interviews were chosen at the convenience of the informant, for example, before or after the wedding, while sitting for tea, or having lunch together. The spontaneity provided a good chance for more in-depth discussions contingent with a personalized tour of life and their understanding of tourism work in the courtyard.

20 I analysed the representation of Lijiang's 'urban sensorium' (Goonewardena 2005), because the tourism imaginaries do not solely rely on material forms but also on sensuous experiences. Visual and audio documentation, such as television programmes, music, films, photography, newspapers, and novels, helped me to understand how the image of Lijiang is constructed and conveyed in the public sphere.

(the social life of Lijiang) and real (the actual wedding performances). Analysing the Naxi Wedding Courtyard as a theatre, this ethnography examines how heritage and ethnic tourism discourses affect sociocultural transformation in Lijiang, and how the way that people come to perform their identity affects that identity itself.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) deploys the metaphor of theatre to understand human interaction and behaviour. According to Goffman, social life is a 'performance' in which different 'actors' interact on the 'stage' and which follows a 'script' that integrates the physical settings, the context, and the prescribed manner of each of the participants' roles. In tourism and heritage studies, the metaphor of performance has often been used to interpret cultural presentations. According to Tim Edensor (2001), 'performance' is an interactive and contingent process, and may be analysed according to the skills of the actors, the context within which it is performed, and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience. The performance metaphor also sheds light on 'the liminal nature of tourism' (Graburn 1983: 21; Turner 1967): on the road, taking part in new activities, apart from the routines and constraints of their daily life, tourists are free to perform and experiment with new modes of self-identity. Understanding both tourists and local participants as performers allows us to study heritage in ways that move beyond heritage models where meanings of objects and practices are determined by institutions and experts. A performance model of heritage repositions it as an affective, embodied, relational and situational practice which is continually unfolding.

This book draws attention to the interconnections between physical settings (stage), redesigned stories (scripts), and social interactions between local actors and guests: everyday life reproduced as theatre. It looks beyond policies and political outcomes, and emphasizes the role of memory, life histories, and personal narratives in relation to heritage production and romantic consumption. Instead of focusing on how meanings and relationships are prescribed by authorities and professionals, I highlight how they are created, reaffirmed, and altered through performances. In such a scenario, it is the individuals who have agency, and who determine the definition of heritage. Meanings and relationships are created, reaffirmed, and altered through embodied and creative engagement with heritage and tourism practices.

Chapter 2 sketches the history of heritage development in Lijiang, and discusses how the place has been transformed into a theatrical stage for the performance of heritage. In response to national policies promoting heritage and ethnic tourism industries, the image of Lijiang has undergone

a process of reconstruction associated with its World Heritage nomination, ethnic theme parks, museum development, and 'exotic' wedding ceremonies. Through a series of acts of recognizing, listing, and branding, local authorities have transformed Lijiang from a historic town into a 'theatre' of heritage. The Naxi Wedding Courtyard is a microcosm of this stage that displays and performs a romantic vision of Naxi culture and authenticity.

Chapter 3 provides the 'scripts' of the wedding performance by examining the evolution of Naxi wedding traditions. Historically, wedding ceremonies were based on the indigenous Dongba religion (which is much like the pre-Lamaist Bon religion of Tibet), a religion which was banned during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as 'feudal superstition.' Since the post-Mao era, Naxi indigenous customs, like many religious and cultural traditions elsewhere in China, have been officially revitalized, reified, and disseminated through folk festivals, performances and heritage programmes. The performance of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is intertwined with previous and current customs of this ethnic group in a way that satisfies modern needs. The state conceptualization of Naxi wedding customs has shifted from 'uncivilized' and 'backward' to 'authentic,' 'ethnic' and 'romantic.' There is an on-going process of negotiation between the state discourse and individual practices. All of the participants – the officials, the entrepreneurs, religious practitioners, tourists and scholars – have the capacity to author and revise these practices through their own engagement with heritage.

In Chapter 4, I present the voices of 'local actors' in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. These stories illustrate how local people participate in the customization of their cultural tradition in Lijiang. These actors perform the roles based on their own interests and relation with the place. The stories also refer to how people adopt, negotiate and resist heritage and tourism discourses. Memory, knowledge, skills and emotion can all lead people to transgress and sometimes even subvert the official script.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at the various types of 'guests' who celebrate their wedding ceremony in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard and catch up on their life 'after the show' in Lijiang. For many Chinese people who have come to Lijiang to escape city life in the coastal regions, or have even become 'lifestyle migrants' to the area, the social construction of romantic heritage in Lijiang and the Naxi Wedding Courtyard energizes their quest for purity, pleasure, freedom, and escape, sometimes to the point of obsession. Yet even if they settle in Lijiang, these 'outsiders' do not leave behind their materialistic, capitalistic and consumerist privileges. Indeed, their social and cultural capital allows them to consume and indulge their hedonistic impulses, while local heritage serves primarily to help them fulfil their fantasy of a

more authentic life. However, romantic consumption in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard and Lijiang can only offer them an instant gratification; most of the guests, including 'lifestyle migrants,' will eventually leave Lijiang in search of other destinations and other forms of romantic consumption.

All of these stories combine to illustrate a multifaceted and vivid picture of how people live in between real and imagined worlds. I close the story in Chapter 7 by pondering on the modern spirit of consumerism in contemporary China. The romantic interests towards the ethnic and natural, the search for customized authenticity, the various forms of resistance as well as the official discourse are all deeply tied to the presence and individual desires of modernity.

I've set the stage. Let the show begin.



## 2 Stage

In heritage, far from being fatally predetermined or God-given, is in large measure our own marvellously malleable creation.  
– Lowenthal (1998: 226)

After a 40-minute flight from Kunming and a 20-minute bus ride, the tourists arrive at the town entrance. The towering words ‘Welcome to Lijiang’ – calligraphy by former Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 1997 – and a giant UNESCO World Heritage Site signboard lead the visitors past a 100-metre wooden waterwheel, down several narrow stone streets into the newly reconstructed Old Town. On one side of the street, souvenir shops, guesthouses, bars, and nightclubs compete for space on the bustling streets of the Old Town, while hostesses dressed in colourful ethnic costumes welcome the guests. On the other side of the street, a stream is diverted to run through the town, flowing from the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain to the Black Dragon Pool.

After a couple of minutes walking along the stream, tourists come to the intersection of the two main streets, Qiyi Street and Wuyi Street, where they pass through a gate adorned with a red plaque and satin banners. The vertical plaque over its entrance signals that this is a Naxi Wedding Courtyard, the Naxi Xiyuan. Red lanterns, a common folk symbol of marriage in China, hang on either side of the gate. While the entrance plaque and the red lanterns may have caught the tourists’ eye, it is the lane leading to the chapel and the paintings of three deities at the end of the courtyard which draw the visitors in.

This Naxi Wedding Courtyard is the subject of this book. It reflects an entanglement of individuals’ desires, dreams, imaginations, and hope. It represents a site jointly established by diverse groups of people with very different agendas, including local government agencies eager to promote the fame of Lijiang as a World Heritage Site; entrepreneurs hoping to preserve traditional culture through the heritage tourism industry; practitioners of the Dongba religion wishing to perform their ethnic identities; and tourists, mainly domestic Han Chinese but some of international origins seeking to fulfil fantasies of romance.

To understand the story of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, it is important to first familiarize oneself with Lijiang’s Old Town. In recent decades, Lijiang has become a ‘stage,’ a space of ongoing change and contestation. Negotiations



between international, national, local, and individual imaginaries transformed Lijiang from a historic town into a romantic heritage destination. Following the reinvention of the ethnic Naxi wedding, intertwined with the traditional and contemporary customs of this minority, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard has become a stage to display and perform local cultural heritage.

## Reconstructing a World Heritage Site

Since China ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1985, both national and regional governments have started utilizing heritage as an effective strategy to obtain political legitimacy and economic benefits. Many local governments at cultural and natural sites established local heritage offices to prepare for the World Heritage nomination procedure. These offices manage the sites and oversee their conservation and promotion once they have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Lijiang is one of them. In this first phase of 'producing' a new imaginary of the town, the local and national governments, as well as UNESCO, play a significant role.

In October 1994, the Yunnan Tourism Planning Conference was held in Dali and Lijiang. During the closing ceremony, the governor of Yunnan Province announced that Lijiang would soon apply for World Heritage status, and in June 1995 national heritage experts conducted a preliminary evaluation of the town. After the investigation, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) decided to include Lijiang's Old Town on the national tentative list for nomination in 1997. Following this decision, the Lijiang government established a heritage nomination working group to initiate the compilation of the nomination dossier. As a retired official, Mr. He, a member of this working group, told me:

We were very excited about the idea of a World Heritage nomination. Like me, many of us come from different departments within the Lijiang government. We started to work intensively together and prepare the documents for the heritage nomination.

However, a magnitude 7 earthquake struck the region of Lijiang on 3 February 1996. Approximately 20 per cent of the houses collapsed, and 300,000 people were forced out of their damaged homes.<sup>21</sup> The nomination procedure was stopped, and governmental efforts concentrated on restoring Lijiang

21 These figures include many towns or villages around Lijiang.

after the disaster (*zai hou chongjian*). Three weeks after the earthquake, a team of experts from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and SACH came to Lijiang to investigate the effects of the earthquake.<sup>22</sup> Mr. He recalls,

Honestly we were worried about the nomination, because we thought the procedure was over. I was surprised that UNESCO really attached great importance to this disaster. During their visit, they carefully studied the situation of the town. They found that while many old buildings had collapsed, the historical urban fabric and the cultural landscape of Lijiang had remained intact. They encouraged us to continue preparing for the UNESCO nomination as planned. This was really exciting news!

After the meeting, the working group continued to prepare the nomination dossier and submitted the documents to UNESCO in June 1996. One year later, an ICOMOS expert, accompanied by officials from SACH, conducted a three-day evaluation and recommended adding the site to the World Heritage List. This decision was formally made during the World Heritage Committee meeting in December 1997 in Naples, Italy, making Lijiang the first World Heritage Site in an ethnic minority area of China. In the UNESCO description, the nomination highlights the cooperation among different ethnic groups as a national project of unity (Shepherd and Yu 2013: 28):

From the 12th century onward, the Old Town of Lijiang was an important goods distribution center for trade between Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet, and is where the Silk Road in the south joins the Ancient Chama (Tea and Horse) Roads. The Old Town of Lijiang became an important center for the economic and cultural communication between various ethnic groups such as the Naxi, Han, Tibetan and Bai. Cultural and technological exchanges over the past 800 years resulted in the particular local architecture, art, urban planning and landscape, social life, customs, arts and crafts and other cultural features which incorporate the quintessence of Han, Bai, Tibetan and other ethnic groups, and at the same time show distinctive Naxi features. In particular, the murals in the religious architecture and other buildings reflect the harmonious co-existence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (UNESCO 1997).

22 As the advisory board of UNESCO, ICOMOS was founded in 1965 to provide specialist knowledge in the conservation and restoration of cultural properties, especially concerning the application of materials submitted by State Parties to inscribe World Heritage Sites.

**Figure 2.1 The World Heritage emblem in the Old Town of Lijiang**



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

After being added to the list, a new government office – the Protection and Management Committee of the Lijiang Old Town World Heritage Site – was set up in 2002. Receiving approval from the People’s Congress of Yunnan Province in 2005, the committee was transformed from a coordinating and advisory body to an administrative agency – the Lijiang Old Town Conservation and Management Bureau (the Heritage Bureau). Whereas work associated with the planning and management of Lijiang heritage sites was previously undertaken by a series of disparate administrative bodies, all work now falls under the purview of the Heritage Bureau. According to the Regulation on the Protection of Lijiang (*Lijiang baohutiaoli*), the Heritage Bureau is in charge of preserving cultural relics, enhancing infrastructure and public utilities, and facilitating marketing and business development.

Reconstruction after the earthquake was one of the main tasks of the Heritage Bureau. Supported by the city government, the Heritage Bureau cooperated with the World Bank to redesign the urban and social fabric of the town. To set up the buffer zone as stipulated in the World Heritage Operational Guidelines, a clear boundary was drawn between the heritage area (the Old Town) and the ‘New Town.’<sup>23</sup> During this project, dozens of two-storey concrete houses built in the 1950s were demolished and replaced by

<sup>23</sup> A buffer zone serves to provide an additional layer of protection to a World Heritage property. The idea of buffer zone has been included in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. For details see UNESCO (n.d.).

**Figure 2.2** The newly built entrance to the Old Town of Lijiang



Photo: Provided by the Lijiang Heritage Bureau

low-rise dwellings, with strict provisions as to their height and their façade. In an attempt to recreate the traditional appearance of Naxi buildings, the builders maintained the Naxi architectural style of *sanfang yizhaobi*, which refers to three houses facing the courtyard and a decorative screen wall reflecting sunlight into the houses. Built from brick and timber, the houses are painted white and decorated with black tiles and red lights. At street level, the bureau replaced cobblestones with polished marble and beautified the canals with shrubs and flowerbeds. The organization also rebuilt and widened two main streets in the north of the town. This reconstruction was designed to recapture the aesthetic features of Lijiang during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Peters 2013).

Lijiang's recognition as a World Heritage Site had a significant impact on the reconstruction and rebranding of the town. As the local authority, the Heritage Bureau used heritage as a tool to rebuild an imagined Lijiang of previous centuries. Here I emphasize that this is a reconstruction, not a restoration, because the heritage work is based neither on scientific evidence and authenticity, as stipulated in heritage conservation guidelines such as the Venice Charter, nor on Liang Sicheng's concept of 'restoring the old as it was' (*zhengjiu rujiu*). The reconstruction project, as it has unfolded after the 1996 earthquake and 1997 World Heritage listing, is based on an imagination that echoes Goullart's interpretation of the town as a 'forgotten kingdom.' The town is reconstructed and frozen in an imagined time and space as an exotic spectacle for display and consumption. Judging from the flood

of tourists to Lijiang in the years that followed, this reconstruction can be viewed as a big success in terms of economic development.

## The Development of Mass Tourism

After UNESCO listed Lijiang as a World Heritage Site in 1997, Lijiang's growing tourism industry started to attract commercial migrants, accreting the town's cultural contact with other parts of China, and indeed the globalized world. While a number of governmental departments as well as UNESCO triggered Lijiang's sociocultural transformation, the ensuing tourism and migration of Han Chinese businesspeople further changed the city's urban landscape. The role of the tourism industry shifted from being an easy way of increasing foreign currency to being part of the official strategy for local development. This strategic change has had a tremendous impact on the social fabric of the town.

He Gang, a local hostel owner, has witnessed the transformations. He Gang and his family own a house close to the north entrance of the Old Town. His mother, Yu, the owner of the Naxi Mama guesthouse, started the business in the early 1990s. At that time, there were not many guesthouses available for tourists. Responding to the increasing numbers of international tourists and foreign backpackers, the Lijiang government started encouraging local residents to set up their own family business and host international tourists. Yu decided to follow this business opportunity. Like other guesthouse owners, Yu renovated their house to create a 'home experience' for Western tourists. Many international travellers stayed at Naxi Mama for a longer period: some of them more than three months. She provided homemade food to all the guests. Naxi Mama has been highly recommended by the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, the internationally famous guidebook for tourists. Here is an account of the experience of one of the guests at Naxi Mama:

Maybe it's due to the very mothering nature of Mama, but eating at the communal table felt [...] good. It feels kind of like dinner with very distant relatives, so it was easy to strike up conversation with the other travellers at the table. At the very least, the communication did not feel forced. Pretty soon, we were even making arrangements to go for tiramisu and yoghurt in the Old Town together. Then again, it could also be because of the obscene amount of beer that we'd ordered.

In any case, Mama's presence could be felt the whole time we were there. She'd make sure you took a (free) banana away with you just before you went off in the morning. She'd hug and kiss you on the cheek just before you

leave. Jo (a fellow traveller) actually came down with a slight flu and had to stay in bed for a day during our time in the Guest House. Mama checked in constantly to make sure that I was keeping Jo well-fed and comfortable. She even poured me some special (and allegedly precious) herbal medicine pills from her own private stash to give to Jo (TW and Jo 2012).

This customized home style of accommodation and Yu's hospitality made their family business very successful, but this success did not last long. Today, He Gang has taken over the business from his mother. In contrast to Western backpackers who prefer to stay in guesthouses that are cheap and easy to make friends at, Chinese tourists demand more comfortable hostels. Many migrants have settled in Lijiang and have opened luxury hostels. When I interviewed He Gang in 2009 at his newly renovated Naxi Mama, he told me about the recent changes to his own business:

Even five years ago, many Japanese tourists came to stay in my hostel and they would rent rooms for months. Now most of the visitors are Chinese who prefer to stay at more luxurious places. Worse, most of the guesthouses are now run by outsiders. Many of my old friends found it difficult to compete with them and sold their businesses. Luckily, Naxi Mama still survives thanks to *Lonely Planet's* recommendation.

The statistics from the Lijiang Bureau of Statistics partially reflect the changes He Gang indicated. Lijiang saw 1.06 million domestic and 45,930 international tourists in 1996 (just prior to the earthquake); increasing to 34.04 million Chinese and some 1.15 million international tourists in 2016. In other words, domestic tourism constitutes the majority of the market, with 96.7 per cent Chinese tourists in 2011. Tourists also spend considerable amounts of money: in 1996 they spent 160 million *yuan*, a figure which rose to a staggering 60.876 billion in 2016.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the dramatic increase in tourists visiting Lijiang, since 2000 there has also been a steady increase in internal migration and business investment. People from Zhejiang, Fujian, Sichuan, and Guangdong Provinces have gradually moved to Lijiang. Along with their arrival, a number of shops serving tourists have opened in the Old Town. Most of the main streets around the town centre such as Dongda Street, Xinhua Street, Xinyi Street, or

24 International tourists contributed 9.7 million USD (c. 80.6 million *yuan*) to Lijiang's earnings in 1996. The figure increased to USD 484 million (c. 3.08 billion *yuan*) in 2016 (Lijiang Bureau of Statistics 2017).

Wuyi Street are now fully occupied by tourist shops, cafes, and restaurants; they sell souvenirs, dresses, CDs, and food. Consequently, heritage tourism converted Lijiang from a historic trade town into a tourism marketplace. In this market, merchants sell mass-produced souvenirs made in other parts of the country, albeit labelled as 'locally made' (Zheng 2011). Furnished with heritage symbols, ethnic culture, and a romantic atmosphere, the town has become a stage for tourist display and consumption.

In 2005 the Heritage Bureau launched the World Heritage Lijiang Commercial Development Plan (*Shijie yichan lijiang shangye fazhan guihua*) and issued several policies concerning construction and business development in the town. Most decisions put more emphasis on the interests of the tourism industry than on the historical value of the town itself.

The conversion of Sifang Square (*Sifangjie*) is an illustrative example of Lijiang's 'heritage facelift.' Throughout history, Lijiang has served as an important trading hub as it is linked with Tibet to the north and India to the south and the west. Sifang Square had been a market hub for businesspeople and locals for several hundred years. A local Naxi man remembered: 'There were various shops in the square such as herbal shops, grocery stores, tailor shops, blacksmiths, leather shops and paper-making workshops.' Since the start of the open-door policy in 1978, many businesspeople have migrated to Lijiang to sell jade and jewellery produced in other provinces of China. At the time, Sifang Square still served as the main market for the local Naxi to buy and sell daily necessities, but it was heavily damaged during the earthquake of 1996.

Nowadays, Sifang Square has been redesigned as a tourist destination for sightseeing and photography. The shopping malls and houses that were built around Sifang Square, ostensibly for the purpose of beautification, were intended to serve tourists, not the local population. Tour guides present the history of Lijiang and introduce the town's tourist attractions. Tourists can pay to ride horses imitating the tea caravans (*mabang*), which used to traverse the Ancient Tea Horse Road, a network of caravan paths winding through the mountains in southwest China.<sup>25</sup> They can also encounter and applaud the Naxi elders dancing in Sifang Square. This local dance originated from a celebratory song *Remeicuo* in the Baishuitai region aimed at driving evil spirits away, and became popular around Lijiang County after 1949 (Arcones 2012). During the dance, Naxi people, men and women, join hands, make a circle and swing their arms back and forth as they sing. As

25 Sigley (2013) argues that in recent years, the notion of Ancient Tea Horse Road has also been constructed as a heritage discourse, and utilized as resources for tourism development.



**Figure 2.3** New Sifang Square with horse riding for tourists



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

Su and Teo (2009) observed, daily activities in Sifang Square have shifted from what once was local community life to a tourism-oriented service.

While the government, UNESCO, and a steady influx of commercial migrants were changing Lijiang's appearance, the local citizens had trouble coping with the town's new development. Traditional family-run businesses were being overrun by tourist shops, which sell industrially produced goods at considerably cheaper prices. The local craftsmen are exposed to commercial competition; they lack protection for maintaining their ability to produce locally made handicrafts. Local grocery stores and restaurants eventually disappeared, unable to compete with the new souvenir shops and fancy restaurants. In response, the Heritage Bureau established a new market close to the south gate of the Old Town. But the distance of the new market from the centre inconvenienced local residents. One Naxi resident complained:

In my childhood, we used to go to the market every day. But now, everything has changed. [...] I have to walk 20 minutes to the new market to buy fresh vegetables, and then carry heavy bundles back home by walking another 20 minutes. [...] It's much better to live in the New Town and shop in the supermarket.

Lijiang has been converted from a historic trade town to a tourism hot spot, a well-set 'stage' decorated with heritage symbols and representations of ethnic



culture for tourist consumption. This consumption, due to the historical reputation of the local ethnic community, is filled with romantic components.

### Becoming a Town of Romance

In 2003, a TV series entitled *One Metre of Sunshine* (*Yimi Yangguang*) was filmed in Lijiang. In this drama, one of the characters commits suicide on the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Lijiang was chosen for this setting because the local Naxi culture has been commonly associated with a tradition called 'dying for love' (*xunqing*). This tradition was described in the ancient Naxi narrative poem *Lubanlurao*, a story in which a young couple died for love. As in the poem, many young Naxi people are uninterested in a marriage arranged by their parents with their own kin, and would rather find partners on their own. According to Naxi scholar He Jiaxiu (2006), suicide occurs frequently among young, unmarried Naxi people. Most cases take place in isolated or remote areas, far from the person's home village. Lovers dying together indicate a shared desire for eternal reunion in paradise. When committing such acts, people wear their best clothing and flee to remote sites with their lovers. They bind their bodies together to ensure a collective transmission to paradise. Couples commit suicide not merely for a fleeting taste of romantic adventure but for the eternal happiness promised in the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain's Third Kingdom, described in Naxi popular legend.<sup>26</sup>

The TV drama *One Metre of Sunshine* was hugely successful on a national scale. No matter whether it is officially recognized by the authorities, Lijiang's fame for love and romance is now overriding its brand as an ethnic historic town and a World Heritage Site (Zhu 2012b). As depicted in a number of novels, films, and popular songs, Lijiang was regarded as 'the land of sacred love.' Since 2006, Lijiang has hosted the annual 'Chinese Valentine Festival' every August to attract young tourist couples. Through these cultural festivals, the tourism industry in Lijiang reinterprets ethnic love traditions and presents them as modern images of romance. Naxi scholar Yang Fuquan once voiced his opinion on these cultural festivals, arguing: 'Naxi festivals should be staged by local Naxi to celebrate some unique aspect of our community, such as the traditional Sanduo festival.'<sup>27</sup>

26 The Third Kingdom of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is a holy site, according to Dongba religion. Naxi people believe this is paradise on earth.

27 The Sanduo festival is a traditional religious festival for Naxi people in Lijiang to worship Sanduo, the god of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and the most powerful territorial spirit of nature in the Lijiang area.

But current inventions of these love festivals are not for Naxi, but only to attract tourists. These festivals lost the original meanings of the traditions.'

However, scholars' critiques were not able to stop the local government from developing Lijiang into a town of romance for tourists. During my stay in Lijiang in 2005, I met many tour guides who repeated the same myth of a Naxi tradition of dying for love (*xunqing*). A number of young couples have come to Lijiang because they enjoyed watching the TV series *One Metre of Sunshine*, and believe in the existence of the 'Third Kingdom,' where they can enjoy eternal love. As one young girl from Beijing told me 'I was walking through all the streets where *One Metre of Sunshine* was filmed. For me, Lijiang is a fantasy where I can find my true love.'

John Urry (2002) uses the idea of 'tourist gaze' to describe the stereotypical expectations when tourists encounter local culture.<sup>28</sup> Using such a 'tourist gaze,' this girl expected to see what she imagined to be an authentic place. Such authenticity is not necessarily related to untouched nature, the original status of architecture, or the back stage of local family life (MacCannell 1973). Instead, this authenticity is an outcome of the ethnic reconstruction in which certain local ethnic symbols have been commercialized for touristic purposes.

Music also plays an important role in the promotion of Lijiang as a romantic heritage destination. Many ethnic love songs are played in the shops around the town. In 2006, a singer named Kankan from Jiangsu Province released a song called 'Tick Tock,' which was the main theme of a popular TV show 'Love Story in Beijing.' After some singers performed it in the bars of Lijiang in 2007, the song became very popular and was played all around the town<sup>29</sup>:

Tick tock tick tock; the clock keeps moving on.  
 Tick tock tick tock; raindrops on the ground are splashing.  
 Tick tock tick tock; do I still miss him?  
 Tick tock tick tock; a few tears fall.  
 Tick tock tick tock; who can I talk to in the lonely night?  
 Tick tock tick tock; who can dry my tears in sadness?  
 Tick tock tick tock; I will refresh myself and continue my journey.  
 Tick tock tick tock; someone else will take care of me.

The soft melody and lyrics of the song perfectly match the romantic atmosphere of the town. Although most of the Naxi residents do not like the song

28 In response, local communities often tailor their culture to match tourists' expectations due to financial interests.

29 The lyrics were translated into English by the author.

and believe that it does not represent Naxi culture, many tourists, such as the following female tourist, were obsessed with it:

I listen to the song everywhere in the town. I listen to the bar singer playing it. I go to the restaurant when it is being played. I heard the song the first day I arrived. Now, I will leave this place, but the melody is still in my mind. I believe the melody will remind me of this magical place. It is a very different experience from what I have in Shanghai. The 'tick tock' gives me peace.

Western travellers visiting Lijiang during the early years of international tourism brought with them expectations different from those of Chinese tourists. I met a number of Western travellers who complained about Lijiang's alleged destruction by mass tourism; they often expressed a sense of 'authenticity loss' and nostalgia about the earlier explorers' narrative about an 'oriental paradise.' On the contrary, Chinese tourists are indifferent as to whether the toured object is fabricated or not. What matters is the exotic and romantic features of a place that differs from their city routines. Chinese tourists are fascinated by narratives and cultural products that reflect and reinforce their notions of romance and the exotic such as the stories of 'dying for love,' the *One Metre of Sunshine* TV series, and the 'Tick Tock' songs.

### **Transforming into a Capital of Love Affairs (*Yanyu*)**

In *Gender and Internal Orientalism in China*, Louisa Schein (1997) has shown that the post-Mao cultural revival of ethnic minorities is linked to the desire to establish a Han-centric, masculine, modern, national self – a desire which is dialectically produced by constructing a backward, feminized, exotic, minority other. In such a context, minority women are often represented as natural and traditional, and associated with danger and allure. Like many ethnic areas in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam or Thailand, there is a stereotype of ethnic tourism in China that non-Han Chinese are often associated with sexual activity (Walsh and Swain 2004). As part of the feminized Chinese ethnic minority project as Schein described, the sensuality and sexuality of ethnic women is often embedded in tourism promotional materials and television programmes. Since early 2000, the demand for sex tourism in Yunnan has steadily increased. An increasing number of tourists come to Lijiang to pursue their dreams of love, and sometimes, these dreams are connected with wild, exotic, and sexual desires.

In September 2007, I saw several prostitutes in a night bar who were dressed in Mosuo costume.<sup>30</sup> One of my local informants told me later that these girls were all Han Chinese from Sichuan, another province in southwest China. Yet they pretended to be local Mosuo girls because customers prefer to have affairs with Mosuo girls who they regard as more attractive. Two days later, a young Chinese tourist I met in Lijiang confirmed this and told me:

How fantastic that the Mosuo men have no partnership responsibility and family burden! How great to chase girls in the town of romance during my Chinese Valentine Festival trip to Lijiang.

The Mosuo, also called 'Na,' is an ethnic group living in the Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces of China. They are culturally different from the Naxi people, but during the government's ethnic identification in 1950s, Mosuo and Naxi were officially recognized as part of the same ethnic nationality. Distinct from the Han custom of marriage, the Mosuo community maintain the tradition of the 'walking marriage' (*zouhun*). This unique marriage custom is deeply rooted in the Mosuo's social and cultural tradition of the matrilineal family system (Mathieu 2000; Cai 2001). The marriage and the propagation of offspring are practised by men who visit women's houses at night, if given permission, and return home early next morning. The couples do not marry each other, and both of them stay in their own matrilineal families for their entire life. Children born from these relationships are raised by their mothers and their mothers' families (often the mother's brothers). The 'walking marriage' custom is commonly described as 'serial monogamy' (Namu and Mathieu 2003). Indeed, many such pairings last for a lifetime and the male partners often do have a role in the care of their children.<sup>31</sup>

The Mosuo culture initially became well known internationally by means of the book *Walk out of the Kingdom of Women*, written by a local Mosuo girl named Yang Erche Namu in the early 1990s. In her book, the Mosuo's matrilineal system and the 'walking marriage' custom are described as 'the living fossil of matrilineal kingdom,' 'the mysterious eastern kingdom of women,' or 'the last matrilineal family of human beings' (Namu and

30 The Mosuo is a small ethnic group located at the border of Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces. Although Mosuo people are culturally distinct from Naxi, the Chinese government has placed them officially in the group of Naxi since both of them are said to originate from the ancient ethnic group of Na. Most Chinese tourists are not aware of the difference between them.

31 For a detailed discussion on the Mosuo and their 'walking marriage,' please see Oppitz and Hsu (1998), Mathieu (2000), He (2000), Walsh (2005), Cai (2001) and Mattison, Scelza, and Blumenfeld (2014).

Mathieu 2003). Since then, a large body of literature has been published on the Mosuo marriage tradition, often perpetuating such romantic ethnic conceptions of the Mosuo.

Due to commercial promotion by tourism operators, ethnic elites, and the local government in Yunnan Province, the image of the Mosuo and their 'walking marriage' custom has been further romanticized, even in nearby areas, like Lijiang, which is not home to the Mosuo. The media primarily portray the Mosuo group as sexually promiscuous: the women change partners frequently; they are said to live in a sexual utopia where women often seduce men. Tourism operators have used the Mosuo's romantic image to market the town, attracting more tourists (especially men) to visit the area. On the Chinese popular social media site Sina Weibo, for instance, Lijiang is framed as the most romantic heartland where tourists search for romance:

A bright moon, a stream along the street, and bars in two-storey ancient wooden buildings, which are decorated with red lanterns. [...] This is the most popular and most crowded place of Old Town – the Xinhua Street or so-called 'Bar Street.' Lying on the tranquilly flowing water of the Old Town, it is famous for a large number of local bars decorated in different styles. [...] Every night, travellers get together here and take part in different forms of entertainment in this fascinating night scenery. They are easily stimulated by the mixed aura of antiquity and modernity, and soon become intoxicated with it. [...] Males and females are talking, laughing, drinking, singing and dancing together in a romantic atmosphere. This could be a start of a beautiful encounter, or a fling in an exotic land. (Sina Tourism 2013)

Driven by Mosuo's 'walking marriage' tradition, local tourism industry has facilitated the transformation of Lijiang into an imaginary of a 'sexual utopia,' or – to use the Chinese term – the 'capital of *yanyu*.' In Chinese, '*yan*' means beauty, and '*yu*' means encountering. *Yanyu* is usually related to an accidental romantic encounter with some stranger. The tourism industry in China has used *yanyu* as a new attraction to market the destination in which tourists expect to have sexual encounters or temporary relationships during their trips. This does not necessarily refer to the prostitution industry, and often concerns relationships among tourists themselves. A popular pictorial pulp called *Yanyu in Lijiang* stated in the preface, '*yanyu* is like a luxurious dinner for beggars. In Lijiang, the dinner never stops. People from all over China come to Lijiang with the desire of searching for something: they search for love, search for sex, and search for romance.'

**Figure 2.4 Bar streets in the Old Town**

Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

When I started my research in 2005, I found that many young Chinese tourists (both men and women) visiting Lijiang were interested in having sexual affairs with local ethnic people. The appeal of casual love affairs for tourists is primarily driven by the Mosuo walking marriage tradition and stories of amorous affairs told by guides or published on the Internet. A common example of affairs tourists engage in is young female tourists who have short-term relationships with charming Naxi singers from remote mountain areas in bars. One of these women, Ms. Hua, a tourist from Beijing, described her attraction to one of the singers, 'the singers eyes are so charming. I can understand from his music that he is full of stories.' This is not an uncommon sentiment and other young women holidaying from large cities express similar feelings of attraction.

Later in 2009, during a return visit to Lijiang, I found that the nature of *yanyu* had changed. With the relocation of many Naxi from the Old Town to the New Town, Lijiang had become the playground for Chinese tourists in search of love affairs among themselves. One afternoon I sat with a tourist named Jun from Shenzhen in the Sakura bar. He was on his third Qingdao beer when he claimed, 'This is a very interesting place, you know.'

This week I already had affairs with three girls from different places in China. I'm not forcing anything. I don't mind where they come from. If we meet in the bars and are both interested in each other, we will have some drinks and dance. If it happens, it happens. It is not only about

sex, but also about feelings, you know. You can't get the same feeling in your daily life.

Like Jun, many Chinese tourists visit the bars each evening during their stay expecting to have an affair with other tourists. These (mostly male) tourists are often keen to talk to each other and share their *yanyu* experience. They take advantage of the relative anonymity and develop temporary relationships during their stay. Affected by the media and the romantic atmosphere in Lijiang, people easily develop the desire to experiment with new forms of emotional intimacy and sexual freedom, a freedom they lack at home.

### Creating a Cultural Theme Park

In 2003, an article entitled 'Lijiang, Whose Old Town Is It?' (*Lijiang, shuide gucheng?*) was published in the newspaper *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekly*). In this article, Ying Yi (2003) raised the question of who owns Lijiang as a World Heritage Site: the local community, tourists, external businesspeople, or the government? The article argued that Lijiang has become a playground of Han Chinese who engage with both cultural production and romantic consumption. Local residents, who are supposed to represent their own culture, are absent in this crowded market.

In addition to the public media, scholars also criticized Lijiang, suggesting it has become a 'hollowed out' (*kongxin hua*) town without the essence of culture (Su and Teo 2009). In the summer of 2013, I had dinner with Prof. He, a local Naxi scholar. While watching tourists passing by the souvenir shops and photographing lanterns and canals, I asked Prof. He what he thought about the recent changes in Lijiang. He responded: 'Lijiang is not so much different from a theme park.' According to him, the reconstruction of the town after the earthquake had transformed Lijiang into 'an amusement park without local culture.'

In reaction to these criticisms, the Heritage Bureau decided to promote Naxi culture heritage. As a part of this strategy, the government has organized Dongba religious festivals and Naxi ethnic concerts each year. Apart from these activities, the Heritage Bureau outsourced most cultural industry projects to local commercial corporations. The Naxi Cultural Industry Company, for example, one of the Heritage Bureau's main contractors, has promoted Naxi culture through the tourism industry since 2000.

The general manager of the Naxi Cultural Industry Company, Mr. Liu, is a local Naxi businessman. As the president of the association, he has been



active in the local cultural industry since the very beginning of tourism development in the town. In response to what he sees as the erosion of Naxi culture in his hometown, he promotes local culture through his businesses. By creating a tourism project based on local folk religion and ethnic culture, he attempted to search for an alternative way of preserving Naxi heritage. This is what Mr. Liu told me about his business:

These days many businesspeople from outside of Lijiang come and dominate the business market. They have money and resources. But they have very little knowledge of Naxi culture and traditions. They are polluting the heritage of my hometown. They bought products from wholesale markets in Zhejiang or Guangdong Provinces. The souvenir products sold here can be found everywhere in China.

We Naxi need to promote our heritage and allow more people to know about real [*zhengzhengde*] Lijiang. I think there are two ways to do it. The first way, as many scholars do, is to write books and conserve objects in the museum. I think there is a second way, by inviting people to participate in our culture, and integrating the tradition into daily life.

In 2005, the Heritage Bureau and the Naxi Cultural Industry Company co-launched a project called 'Encountering a Naxi Family' (*Zoujin naxi renjia*) to diversify Lijiang's heritage tourism products and promote authentic Naxi culture. Ten traditional courtyards in Lijiang, including the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, were selected to exhibit Naxi handicrafts, clothing, music, religion, food, and wedding traditions. These selected residential houses are primarily located in Qiyi and Wuyi streets, an area of family-owned handicraft workshops in earlier times.

According to the project description, a local family resides in each of the selected houses: financially supported by the Heritage Bureau, they work there and exhibit particular aspects of Naxi culture. Some courtyards are accessible for free while others charge entrance fees. Each courtyard has an exhibition room to present the history and cultural background of one specific traditional handicraft, as well as a show room where people are able to experience the manufacturing process. Families are also able to sell their handicrafts to visitors as souvenirs. Laoqing, for instance, used to own a family workshop to produce and sell copper products to local Naxi people for a living. In 2005, Laoqing's workshop was selected as one of the houses to display his copper-making craftwork. Agreeing with the selection, Laoqing makes copper products in his family workshop during daytime. His wife sells the products to tourists and educates them about her husband's craft.



**Figure 2.5** One of the courtyards displaying traditional cloth sewing



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2006

They are expected to wear Naxi clothes during visiting hours. As Mr. Liu explained, 'this makes the family more authentic in front of tourists.' With the local Naxi family living in these courtyards, the project has transformed family life into an exhibition for consumption.

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard is one of these ten houses. In contrast to other courtyards exhibiting various elements of Naxi culture, this courtyard offers Naxi wedding ceremonies as a tourist participatory service. Such projects – with a theme of authentic Naxi culture – provide legitimacy to developing commercial business while maintaining the town's World Heritage status. During the UNESCO-ICOMOS monitoring mission in 2008, the director of the Heritage Bureau guided the UNESCO representatives to all the selected theme houses of 'Encountering a Naxi Family' and invited them to have dinner at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. The director of the Heritage Bureau presented Mr. Liu's project as an innovation of heritage conservation and sustainable development of local culture. As introduced by him, 'The wedding ceremony aims to protect local culture heritage, even if it is a paid service.' The project has received positive feedback from the mission experts.

Mr. Liu adopted the discourse of authenticity from the local government, who used similar terms to convince UNESCO of their World Heritage status. According to Mr. Liu, 'Instead of *yanyu*, the cultural tourism project of "Encountering a Naxi Family" encourages tourists to experience ethnic and authentic culture.' The promotion material of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard indicates their intention. The material states:

As a World Heritage Site, Lijiang has its unique natural and cultural resources. The ethnic Naxi tradition and the world-famous living Dongba culture, the only religion still using hieroglyphic scripts, attracts both domestic and international tourists to visit the site. However, due to commercialization and modernization, the peaceful town lost its original culture. Supported by Lijiang city government, we developed the project of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard to promote and present authentic Naxi ethnic wedding traditions. We welcome tourists to experience this different ethnic culture. We are also happy to see local Naxi relearn their traditions. By staging original, pure, and romantic Naxi weddings, we provide a platform for tourists and local Naxi to communicate with and learn from each other. (Chinese promotional material of the company, translated by the author)

To promote the discourse of authenticity, words such as 'ethnic,' 'magic,' 'ancient,' 'untouched,' 'authentic,' and 'pure' are highlighted throughout the advertising and promotional materials. These descriptions, common in heritage tourism discourse, also highlight that local heritage is under threat and, if lost, irreplaceable. The company affirms that the more 'exotic' or 'authentic' the service presented is, the more enticing it will be for tourists.

## Conclusion

Western traditional conservation theories have often emphasized the significance of the physicality of place. Nevertheless, heritage should also be regarded as a social and cultural production that involves a constant process of creation and destruction. This is particularly the case in some Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and China, where renewal and reconstruction has become part of the long-standing tradition of heritage conservation.

This chapter focuses on the social and cultural contexts of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, a Lijiang business that adapts traditional Naxi wedding ceremonies for tourists, arguing that the state and various other actors have

(re)produced Lijiang as a stage for cultural performances and romantic consumption. After Western explorers like Rock and Goullart, swayed by colonial nostalgia, presented Lijiang as an oriental paradise in historical reports, this image has continuously been fostered by others such as the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks. Since 1997, Lijiang's Old Town has become a World Heritage Site by following the UNESCO heritage conservation guidelines. The local government used the post-earthquake reconstruction as an opportunity to recreate the built environment not as it had been, but to match early twentieth century tourist images of Lijiang. The ethnic image of a frozen and timeless Naxi culture has been further manipulated by the public media and represented in television documentaries, theme parks, fashion boutiques, and museums as a result of romantic consumption.

For local authorities like the Heritage Bureau, heritage is not only the object of regulation but also a means of production and profit. They deliberately use the heritage industry to foster economic development, and by extension, its ruling legitimacy, as it is based on continuous economic growth (Zhao 2009). To respond to the public criticism of over-commercialization, the Heritage Bureau has come up with a specific solution for heritage conservation. By developing profitable cultural industry projects, such as 'Encountering a Naxi Family,' the Heritage Bureau has turned local family life into commodities for exhibition and consumption. In these projects, it is not the local residents themselves who represent or even own their culture; the authorities decide what should be presented to lure tourists. With the guidance of local authorities, these families are educated to be 'authentic' and are transformed into an alternative form of cultural heritage.

In these stories, the existing power relationship is unbalanced, especially when the nation state as the framework for identity and device of governance becomes overwhelming in people's daily lives. It is still heritage management – inspired by expert knowledge and economic incentive – that defines what heritage is, and determines the manner of heritage representation (Smith 2006; Brett 1996).

It is not surprising to find stories similar to that of Lijiang elsewhere in China, especially since economic development has been at the top of the national agenda for more than three decades. Very similar stories have occurred elsewhere in Yunnan and in other regions of China, such as the invention and reconstruction of Shangri-La. Zhongdian, a town 150 kilometres away from Lijiang, at the border of Yunnan and the Tibetan region, was renamed Shangri-La in 2001. Referring to exoticism and eternal love, the theme of Shangri-La appeared in James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon*, published in 1933. Western backpackers often move on from Lijiang to

Shangri-La to explore a better, less touristic place to match their dream of finding a 'real Shangri-La.' However, as Ben Hillman (2003) has shown, the town is experiencing a shared destiny with Lijiang of cultural destruction. Without the consideration of the local community, cultural heritage has often become an economic project manipulated by governmental agencies that have their own entrepreneurial pursuits and policy agendas.

This chapter illustrated how different actors have created a 'stage' in Lijiang by transforming its built environment and tourism imaginaries over time. In the next chapter, I will move on to the content of the Naxi wedding tradition which functions as a script for cultural performances. Against the backdrop of Lijiang's transformation, the performers of the wedding tradition are adhering to the officially sanctioned way of inventing cultural performances in order to legitimize the promotion of its cultural authenticity. Heritage, as referring to both place and cultural tradition, becomes a battleground for different groups of people, where conflicts over pride, profits, and identities unfold.



### 3 Scripts

It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the ‘invention of tradition’ so interesting.

– Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983: 2)

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard was crowded on that summer night in 2011. The character for ‘double happiness’ (*shuang xi*) in red was stuck on the windows, walls, and doors,<sup>32</sup> and a number of lit red candles were on the tables and in the corners of each room. Tonight was the night – three couples would get married here. Tourists flowed into the courtyard. They sat beside the big tables, taking photos and whispering to each other. They looked straight to the main hall in the centre of the courtyard, where the wedding would soon start.

The three couples appeared and knelt in the chapel. Before them was an elaborately decorated table. Upon it sat an altar made of stones, and beside it stood a bowl of rice. In the middle of the altar was a carved basket: the embodiment of Su, the life god of the Naxi people. A lump of butter was next to the altar. A pair of triangular, perforated paper pennants lay behind the altar, while a pair of red candles were at the front. On the wall above the table hung three scroll paintings, depicting the main deities for the ceremony.

Fuhua, a Dongba working in the courtyard, wearing a yellow vest and a long red gown covered with white symbols, walked into the chapel. On his head was a bamboo-framed five-panelled wool crown, with gods of the Dongba painted on each side. A number of photographers and visitors followed him since they knew the crucial part of the ceremony, the Dongba ritual, would soon begin. Fuhua placed a series of ritual instruments on the table, including a cymbal, a drum, a gong, holy books, pine twigs, and a pair of cups holding offerings of rice, fruit, and nuts. To commence the ritual, he spoke a few sentences in Naxi:

Brilliance! Out with the dirty! In with the good!  
When the world was created,  
Heaven and earth were polluted by foul stench,

32 Double happiness (*shuang xi*) is a traditional Chinese character that is frequently used as decoration and symbol of marriage. The character is often in red and associated with celebrations.

The heavens were pale,  
 The earth was dark.  
 Cleaned with three drops of dew,  
 Cleaned with three gusts of wind,  
 The heavens will be as clear as a mirror,  
 The earth will be as pure as grey jade.  
 [...]

The god of happiness!  
 The god of auspiciousness!  
 Please come from the high mountains,  
 Please come from the wide roads,  
 Please come to our village,  
 Please come to the room of fortune!

While chanting, Fuhua dipped pine twigs in water, and proceeded to sprinkle water in every corner of the chapel. He applied butter on the foreheads of the three couples. He then chanted and danced, walking in and out of the chapel, appearing before the crowds and returning to the couples. 'The ritual is very important for the wedding ceremony,' Fuhua said after the ceremony. 'It symbolizes the separation of each of the couples from their old households and the creation of a new household.'

Fuhua's Dongba ritual has become the most sacred and attractive part of the wedding ceremony of the courtyard. Yet, is this ritual really a local tradition, as the courtyard purports? What does this tradition mean to the Naxi? And why has it become a service for Chinese tourists?

Focusing the analysis on the transformations behind Naxi wedding traditions in Lijiang, this chapter will examine how this wedding ritual has become the main script of the performance staged in the courtyard. While the scripts of these cultural performances are based on tradition and are seen as an authentic reproduction of the past, scripts are nevertheless constantly contested, negotiated, and reinterpreted by different actors. This process of adaptation transforms a community-based cultural custom into an audience-centred cultural performance for romantic consumption.

### **Dongba as Religious Practitioners**

When Joseph Rock arrived in Lijiang in 1920, he was residing in a village at the base of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (*Yulong xueshan*). Rock was attracted by several local religious ceremonies in the area. Living in the Lijiang plain for

more than ten years, Rock studied Dongba-hosted rituals that he designated as ‘main ceremonies.’ With permission from local Dongbas, he documented these rituals and published his findings in *National Geographic*. This was the first time Dongba practices were documented in the Western world. In one of his articles, Rock (1924) describes Dongbas as a number of strange priests, with their hopping dance and leaps into the bonfire. Comparing the local Naxi religion with that of the Tibetan Bon religion, Rock found that Naxi traditions have their origin in an early form of Tibetan Bon religion, which preceded the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>33</sup> By communicating with the spirits, the Naxi believe that they are able to avoid danger and use the power of the spirits for their own benefit (Goullart 1955).

The word ‘*dongba*’ is of Tibetan origin, meaning ‘wise man, teacher, or founder of a particular doctrine’ while sometimes it also refers to the religious practices themselves (Arcones 2012: 82). Taking the role of educators and advisers, they once enjoyed high social and political status. But more recently, the ruling elite and urbanized local Naxi population in Lijiang started to look down on the Dongba and instead promoted other religions. With the decline in their social role, the Dongba had become part-time religious specialists and part-time farmers (McKhann 2010).

In Dongba tradition, the transfer of knowledge usually occurs inside relationships of formal kinship, such as between father and son or uncle and nephew.<sup>34</sup> Dongbas begin training at the age of seven. They mainly learn from ritual books in pictographic characters, consisting of about 1,400 drawings of gods, demons, and animals, as well as natural and human objects. Written on long, narrow sheets of handmade paper, the ritual books function as the recorded instructions (scripts) to guide the Dongbas in their ritual performances.<sup>35</sup> Dongbas use these books to perform their rituals, which are based on long phases of chanting in correct order (McKhann 2010). Through chanting and dancing, these Dongbas invite gods (or appease demons) to fulfil certain social or individual functions. Since Dongbas need to recall the origin of all spirits that they summon, these ritual books integrate every aspect of Naxi society, including its history, myth, religion, folklore, music, dance, and medicine (Arcones 2012).

33 The relationship between the Dongba religion and Tibetan Bon has been studied by many scholars, including McKhann (1992), Mathieu (2003), Yang (2008), and Arcones (2012).

34 Sometimes an aspirant who is training to become a Dongba can seek instruction from a master in his or other villages.

35 As Mathieu (2003: 146) discusses, Dongba manuscripts record ritual liturgy. She classified them into three broad categories: ceremonial books, index books, and divination.



Young apprentices have the opportunity to learn from their teacher by participating in village rituals. Only by memorizing the texts are they able to perform the chanting and dancing required during various rituals and rites. They also learn to make religious instruments by weaving, painting, and woodcarving. Once the apprentice is capable of conducting at least six major ceremonies, his mentor proclaims him a Dongba. Throughout his life, a Dongba will continue to learn new rituals and ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> A good Dongba (or so-called 'big Dongba') is able to conduct more than 20 large rituals and recite hundreds of texts.

Dongba rituals are performed at major events during the life course: birth, marriage, sickness, house building, and death.<sup>37</sup> Depending on its nature, a Dongba ceremony may last from a few hours (for expelling evil spirits) to several days (in cases of death). There is always a host, most commonly the head of a family or village, who invites the Dongba to perform the relevant ritual. Naxi ceremonies are conducted in different locations, including villages, fields, and private homes. The host, with the assistance of the Dongba's apprentice, is responsible for setting up an altar for offerings to ancestors or gods, or to appease demons. After the rites of passage are performed, the host provides the Dongba with food and cash, depending on the economic situation of the family.

Every Naxi village commonly has one or two Dongbas. Each Dongba has a particular way of conducting rituals, as inherited from his father or uncle. Prof. Ming from the Dongba Cultural Institute showed me more than 80 books in his office, which he had collected from various Naxi villages for wedding ceremonies. As Prof. Ming told me, there are no standards for rituals; each Dongba has his own books for recitation during the ceremony. Dongbas are free to compose rites and rituals by drawing on texts themselves or by using inherited texts from their teachers or ancestors. They usually work individually, loosely associating with others. Only in some grand ceremonies will Dongbas collaborate with each other.

36 Some scholars (such as McKhann 1992; Chao 1996; Mathieu 2003) have argued that the communists have discouraged female Naxi practitioners (often called *pa* or *sainiis*) from performing rituals since 1950s.

37 Rock (1947) divided them into fifteen categories: worship of nature, worship of wind and mountain spirits, worship of nature sprits, prayers for the prosperity of the family and the increase of flocks, propitiation, purification and cleaning of a place, funerary and marriage ceremonies, inviting the ancestors, prolongation of life, prevention of evil arising from the sky and land, to avoid calamities, propitiation of demons, elimination of accumulated sins, suicides, and unnatural deaths.

## Transformations in Dongba Practices since 1949

Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Dongba traditions were widely practiced in Naxi areas such as Lijiang; this, however, changed with the beginning of the Mao era. The most disastrous destruction of the Dongba practices occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when so-called 'capitalist and feudalistic elements' were removed from Chinese society to make room for Maoist communism. The revolution led to policies that forcefully eliminated religions; a large number of places of worship were destroyed. The movement wreaked havoc on minority cultures nationwide, and devastated the Dongba religion. Dongbas, like other indigenous religious practitioners and magical healers such as diviners, shamans, sorcerers, geomancers, and witches, were categorized by the state as 'heterodox' (*yiduan*) or 'feudal superstition' (*fengjian mixin*).<sup>38</sup> In the mountain villages of the Lijiang Basin, Dongbas were pressured to reduce their numbers, and the training of new Dongbas was strictly prohibited (McKhann 2010). Thousands of religious books were burned and a number of ceremonies were forgotten. The government discouraged Naxi traditions and replaced traditional Confucian education with a new socialist model.

Since the economic reform and open-door policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, ethnic and religious diversity has been rediscovered and reaffirmed. The state identified five official religions (*zongjiao*) in China: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism.<sup>39</sup> The Chinese government also started to tolerate and promote other indigenous religions as a form of ethnic culture. Religious practices, which were once classified as 'superstition,' were now to be used for the purposes of enhancing social stability, ethnic equality, and tourism. According to anthropologist Emily Chao (1996), the local government in Lijiang restructured and transformed the Dongba practices into a new form of culture in order to construct difference in terms of ethnic boundaries.

38 Superstition (*mixin*) is a neologism introduced to China from the West via Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. Revolutionists condemned religions in the past, such as Buddhism, Daoism, and other indigenous religions, as superstitions. After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, idolatry, cults, rituals, and religious specialists were continued to be perceived as the living embodiments of superstition, and were strictly suppressed by the state authorities.

39 The Chinese Communist Party used Marxist ideology to classify and categorize religions domestically. Generally speaking, traditions can be categorized as religion if they have a central organization (temples, churches, monasteries, and mosques) with full-time practitioners and codified scriptures.

The concept of 'Dongba culture' (*Dongba wenhua*) was created and promoted by He Wanbao and his colleagues in a workshop in the late 1970s. He Wanbao, a Communist Party official and a Naxi himself, was regarded as an ethnic separatist (*minzu fenliezhe*) and forced to resign during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1970s, He Wanbao was reappointed as the senior Naxi representative of the Yunnan Provincial Commission of Nationalities. According to He, the new form of 'Dongba culture' was a mutation of its original form, sanitized and redesigned for public consumption. It no longer contained so-called superstitious elements and had been transformed into various consumable, solely cultural products, such as literature, art, and dance. All these efforts were implemented after the establishment of the Dongba Culture Research Institute.

The institute was established in 1981, a joint venture of the Lijiang County government together with the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. The institute consists of several Naxi historians, ethnologists, and Dongbas, many of whom survived the trials of the Cultural Revolution. They were invited by ethnologists and lexicographers specifically to have their traditional cultural knowledge documented for posterity. To this day, their main duties are to translate Dongba religious manuscripts into Chinese for the sake of preserving Naxi culture and to facilitate scholarly analysis of ethnic knowledge. The scholars and Dongbas in the institute also stage major rituals, such as the 'sacrifice to heavens' and the funerary rites for a Dongba.<sup>41</sup> Major events like the sacrifice to heavens require the direction of a leading Dongba and several assistants. As Dongbas from different villages do not perform rituals in the same way, the institute has attempted to institutionalize Dongba culture and standardize their practices. While ritual books had previously been handed down from generation to generation and interpreted differently by each Dongba, this process of institutionalization has transformed and streamlined the Dongba rituals into an essential script for ritual performance.

With the Dongbas reframed as scholars, and the ritual texts redefined as an informational compendium and scholarly encyclopaedia, Naxi officials have moreover transformed the religious practices into what they recognize as Dongba culture (Chao 2012). This has enhanced the ethnic identity and raised the prestige of the Naxi. The institute defines Dongba culture as follows:

40 Based on the Chinese legal system, an ethnic separatist refers to a person who devotes him or herself to the independence of certain ethnic group.

41 Three big rituals were staged on the ground of the institute, the sacrifice to wind in 1985, the sacrifice to heaven in 1986 and the sacrifice to a dragon god in 1988.

Dongba culture refers to ancient Naxi culture. It has been referred to in this way because it is mostly found in Dongba practices, which is believed to be one thousand years old. The content of Dongba culture includes different fields like history, language, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, customs, literature, arts, painting, dancing and music. Dongba culture involves precious knowledge accumulated by the Naxi people, supporting the development of Naxi society over time.

Whereas the revitalization of Dongba culture has provided scholars with an authoritative voice for 'speaking for the Naxi past' (Chao 2012: 57), religious practitioners have not obtained this voice. Rather, institutions speak for them, like the Dongba Culture Research Institute that claims to represent Dongba culture. Following the institute, several other Dongba institutions have been established, such as the Dongba Culture Museum in 1984,<sup>42</sup> the Dongba Calligraphy and Painting Association in 1991, and the Dongba Cultural Promotion Association in 1998.

The Lijiang government recognized the value of Dongba culture and began promoting it on both the domestic and international stage. In 1999, the Lijiang municipal government launched the first International Dongba Culture Festival.<sup>43</sup> More than 260 scholars and 92 Dongbas attended an academic conference during this festival. The main topic of the debate was how to utilize Dongba culture for the development of tourism, and how to protect and revitalize (*baohu chongzheng*) Naxi culture. This conference can be considered as an essential part of ethnic tourism development in Yunnan after the International Expo held in Kunming in 1999. Soon after the conference, the *Translation and Annotation of Naxi Dongba Ancient Scripts (Naxi Dongba guji yizhu quanji)* was published in a hundred volumes. Only accounting for a part of the institute's efforts to promote Dongba culture, these volumes highlighted several key aspects of it, including ethnic language, dance, and art. In addition, the institute exhibited Joseph Rock's publications to showcase the significance of Dongba culture and its connection with international scholarship (Chao 2012: 56).

In 2003, the 'Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature Manuscripts' were nominated for the Memory of the World Register, a cultural category initiated by

42 Initially called Lijiang County Museum, the museum was officially renamed the Lijiang Dongba Culture Museum in 1999 and approved by the Yunnan Province municipal government.

43 According to Yang (2008), senior Dongbas still maintain their ritual practices in some of the villages in the outskirts of Lijiang, especially in Tacheng and Ludian County. They work part-time as ritual practitioners and farmers in their villages. However, because of better pay, many young Dongbas have left their villages in search of jobs in Lijiang.

UNESCO for the sake of enhancing the preservation, access, and awareness of historical documents and knowledge (UNESCO 2003b). In this nomination, the UNESCO website announced that:

Dongba culture is becoming dispersed and is slowly dying out. Only a few masters can read the scriptures. The Dongba literature, except for that which is already collected and stored, is on the brink of disappearing. In addition, being written on handmade paper and bound by hand, the literature cannot withstand the natural ageing and the incessant handling. Under such circumstances, the problem of how to safeguard this rare and irreproducible heritage of mankind has become an agenda for the world. (UNESCO 2003a)

The local authorities were very pleased about this news. The director of the Dongba Cultural Museum, Li, explained, 'Dongba culture is not shamanism and naturalist worship. It represents Naxi culture. Without Dongba culture, there will be no Naxi.' Li's enthusiasm about the UNESCO listing indicates the official intention to use Dongba culture as a means to strengthen ethnic identity. Such global recognition provides these institutions with a greater voice and an increased opportunity to obtain governmental support at higher levels. As a result, Dongba practices have been transformed from a form of feudal superstition to the symbol of Naxi civilization.

The listing of the Dongba manuscripts on the Memory of the World Register has also given the local government an opportunity to integrate Dongba culture into the ethnic tourism industry to stimulate economic growth. For instance, the newly established Dongba culture centres have trained a number of new Dongbas. In their educational training, these centres emphasize skills such as writing and dancing without providing young Dongba students with the context of the rituals (McKhann 2010). After completing their training, these Dongbas do not necessarily practice their craft: some of them work instead in souvenir shops. They design souvenirs with Dongba pictograph characters by mixing them with Han Chinese characters. Once used exclusively by Dongbas in rituals, the pictographic characters are now sold in souvenir shops to remind tourists of their unique trip to Lijiang (Zong 2006). They appear on various souvenirs, such as T-shirts, scarves, key chains, calendars, bracelets, and even cigars. One scholar from the Dongba Culture Research Institute complained to me that the souvenir market destroyed the essence of Dongba culture. According to

him, the commodification eradicated the original meaning of the religious messages.<sup>44</sup>

Above all, the recent changes in Dongba practices allow local authorities to exercise control over a once powerful fragment of Naxi history. Such changes enhance the scope of its own antiquity while simultaneously encouraging the Naxi people to identify their own history within the state (McKhann 1992). On the other hand, these efforts have helped the Naxi to rediscover and value their Dongba practices. The revitalization of Naxi traditional weddings is one outcome of such a transformation.

### Traditional Naxi Wedding

Nowadays many Naxi villages in the mountain areas still maintain the tradition of having wedding rituals conducted by Dongbas (Mathieu 2003; McKhann 1992). According to the Dongba Culture Research Institute, more than 30 forms of scriptures are used in weddings rituals in mountain areas such as Ludian and Tacheng County. To perform a full wedding ritual, Dongbas usually chant for several hours. At each stage of the wedding ritual, Dongbas use different scriptures to chant, depending on their respective religious functions. Indeed, even in the same village, two Dongbas' chanting may differ slightly for the same kind of ritual. However, several stages are regarded as necessary during the performance.<sup>45</sup>

In Naxi tradition, the wedding ritual is mainly directed at the god Su, who brings 'life, vitality, rejuvenation, and prosperity to the family' (Xi 2004: 181). Every household has their own Su. The marriage ritual aims to separate Su from the bride's original family and to join her with the husband's family. Once the new household is established, the bride has the right to worship Su and participate in the social activities of her husband's family (Chao 1995). Naxi believe Su will protect the newly married couple and activate

44 The institute was not innocent, however. It has also participated in the commercialization of Dongba culture. It established a small shop in the entrance of the institute that sells Dongba souvenirs. The staff and even Dongbas from the institute cannot avoid the lure of the economic benefits arising from the tourism business. Many have worked for the government or have joined the tourism business as consultants to earn supplementary income. They legitimize their association with the tourism industry by arguing that tourism offers new opportunities for raising awareness of the importance of the Dongba religion among the public.

45 The traditional Naxi wedding rituals have been recorded in various ways in different publications, either by Western scholars such as Mathieu (2003), McKhann (1992), and Arcones (2012), or by Naxi scholars such as Yang (2008) and Mu (1995).

the vitality of the new household. The traditional customs are described in the following.

On the wedding day, members of the groom's family sacrifice a pig or a sheep in front of the altar early in the morning. What follows is a sequence of five different rituals, which will separate the bride and the groom from their families in order to unite them as a new family. Firstly, the Dongba performs the *suku* ritual inviting the Su of the bride. The Dongba indicates that the bride brings vitality to the groom's family. Once the ritual is completed, the second ritual, the *suke*, is performed to separate the vitality of the bride from her natal family; 'ke' means separation. The bride washes her hands for the last time in her family's house and cries to express her grief for leaving home. This ceremony ensures that she does not carry away all the vitality from her natal family.

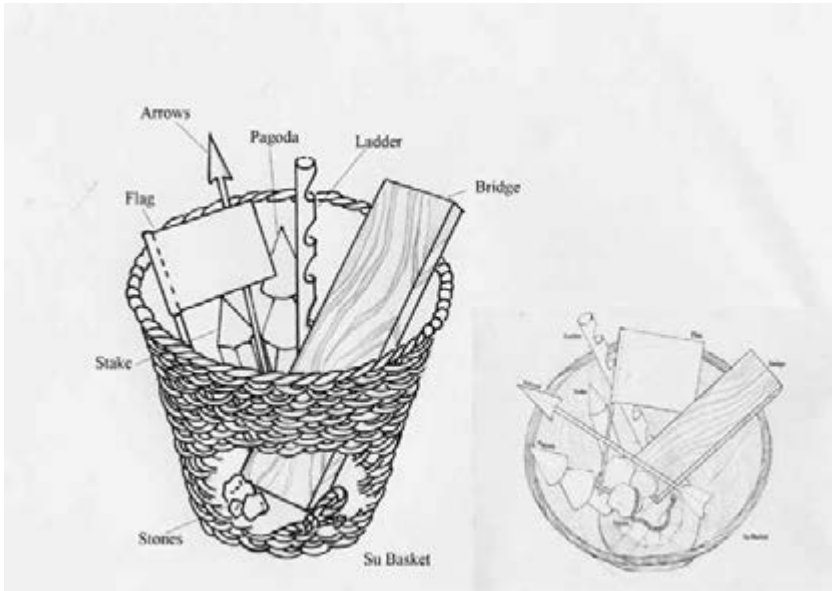
After the *suke* ritual, the Dongba thirdly continues with the *sumigong* ritual, chanting around the fire pit in the presence of the bride's family. The Dongba puts butter on the head of each family member (also called *baomabao*) and sings: 'The Ni and Nuo of your family cannot leave; the god of cereals, the god of the domestic animals cannot leave; the god of birth cannot follow her and leave.' This ritual comforts the Su god of the bride's family, making sure she does not follow the bride to the groom's family.

After the rituals at the bride's home are completed, the bride and groom leave for the groom's house. There the main ritual of the Naxi wedding – the *suzu* – is performed. Once inside the groom's home, the bride and groom kneel in front of an altar on top of which is a basket where the god of Su resides. All the life gods of the family live inside the sacred basket, which ordinarily hangs above the hearth so that the family gods can protect the household. The Su basket is filled with objects that represent different elements of the world: an arrow, nine stones, a stake, a pagoda, a ladder, a small bridge and some flags. The nine stones and arrow with five coloured barbs<sup>46</sup> represent the enduring nature and strength of the groom's paternal lineage. The stake binds the souls of the newlyweds. The ladder represents the path from earth to heaven.<sup>47</sup> The pagoda is a symbol of the female. The

46 Dongba practices partially adopted this ideology from Daoism. The five colours represent the five elements of nature: iron, wood, water, fire, and earth.

47 The connection of human beings with heaven through the god Su is suggested in a pictograph that shows a couple ascending the ladder to the realm of the celestial god Zilao Apu. The ladder is also a reference to the shamanic character of Naxi culture, as shamans use a ladder to ascend to the sky, and gods and dead souls are said to descend to earth by means of ladders (Stutley 2003).



**Figure 3.1 A Su basket and the objects inside**

Sketch: Weiqi Yan, 2017

bridge, which is made of pinewood, represented the route between life and death (Xi 2004). Finally, two flags symbolize victory and strength, and the Su basket itself is the body as the mother gives birth to a new child.

During the *suzu* ritual, the presiding Dongba, while chanting, sprinkles water on the basket with small pine twigs,<sup>48</sup> representing the expulsion of evil (*couziming*). After the altar is cleansed, the Dongba ignites the oil lamp (*bannimizhi*) and scatters rice on the Su basket. Then the Dongba takes out the ladder and the bridge, and passes them to the bride. The Dongba takes out the pagoda and the stake, and passes them to the groom. The groom and bride's bodies are then tied together with a red string: the thread of the gods. This is called 'tying the Su,' the climax of the *suzu* ritual.

At the end of the ritual, the Dongba takes all the items from the bride and groom's hands, binds them together with the red string, and places them in the Su basket. The Dongba then gives the groom a new arrow (his power), asking him to place it in the basket (the new female body). This action separates the son from his former family and unites the couple in a

48 The bride's kin carry the pine branches from the bride's house and put them in the groom's courtyard.



new life. The union of the arrow with the basket symbolises the promise of their offspring.

Upon completion of the *suzu* ritual, the *sumaba* ritual is performed as the fifth and last stage of the wedding. During this ritual, the Dongba chants and applies butter on the forehead of the newly married couple.<sup>49</sup> He dips the pine twigs into rice wine mixed with sheep gall and then sprinkles them over the bride and groom. The Dongba also smears butter oil and sprinkles rice wine on the belongings of the family to please the Su, encouraging her to bring prosperity to the new family. This ritual ensures that the Su protects the vitality of the couple as well as the possessions of the family. After the *sumaba*, the bride and groom bow before their parents and kin, concluding the wedding.

Traditional Naxi wedding ceremonies follow a particular script which involves a number of performative steps and ritual objects. By following the script, the bride, the groom and the other guests enact a cultural performance for the god Su. Over the course of the last decade, however, many elements of this traditional religious Naxi wedding ceremony have withered away due to the Naxi's interaction with other cultures.

### Current Marriage Customs in Lijiang

Since the early twentieth century, Han-style marriages have gradually replaced traditional Naxi ceremonies. In these reformed marriage ceremonials, the religious elements within Dongba practices were reduced. Instead, Han practices were introduced and fused with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. As part of the new wedding custom, parents often arrange the marriage for their children (*fumubaoban*).<sup>50</sup> With the assistance of a go-between and a Daoist priest, Sinicized marriage practices include several new steps in the wedding ritual, such as engagement, preparation, and the wedding ceremony.<sup>51</sup> Starting in the 1950s, the communist government

49 Butter is used for worshipping gods. It symbolizes the body of the mother, which nourishes life. See Mu (1995).

50 Naxi society had a strong preference for cousins to marry (that is, a man and the daughter of his paternal aunt).

51 In the Sinicized custom, Naxi families start to arrange and plan their children's marriage when they reach the age of five or six. A go-between (*meiren*) visits the groom's house and divines the 'eight characters' (the year, month, day and hour of one's birth) of the children, a ritual phrased as 'asking the name' (*wen ming*) (Chao 1996). If both families deem the couple a suitable match, the go-between visits the bride's house for three years in order to deliver numerous

introduced a new marriage law to enforce freedom of marriage and to prohibit parentally arranged marriages. Since then, marriage customs among the Naxi, especially in towns and cities, have been further influenced by Han culture.

Like the Chinese wedding ceremony, modern Naxi weddings are associated with families and relatives, the couple, and gods of Heaven and Earth. Although Han Chinese customs have had a profound impact on the marriage customs of the Naxi people in the Lijiang plain, the Chinese did not force the Naxi to change their wedding practices (Mathieu 2003: 243). Instead, the current Sinicized marriage custom is a result of long-term ethnic integration among Chinese immigrants and the Naxi people.

In the summer of 2007, I was invited to attend a Naxi wedding in a village close to Lijiang. On the morning of the wedding, I accompanied the groom, the go-between and a group of their friends to the bride's home. When we arrived at the house, the bride denied us entry, a ritual practice that demonstrates her unwillingness to leave her family. After an hour of negotiations, the bride agreed to accompany the party back to the groom's house with her family and kin following with the dowry. The bridal procession preceded slowly allowing the villagers to examine the party and the dowry being offered. When we reached the groom's house, firecrackers were lit and hung from the main gate; large pieces of red paper with the character *xi* (happiness) written on them were pasted in the windows. All around the house people threw red paper and candy at the bride as the wedding ceremony started. In front of family, friends and the go-between, the couple bowed to Heaven and Earth, to their ancestors and to each other. After the ceremony everyone moved into the courtyard for the wedding banquet. Whereas guests offered the newlyweds money as gifts, family members did not give material presents but instead helped out with running the ceremony and banquet. Some of the groom's kin, for instance, invited guests to sign a long white paper, while the groom's female relatives looked after the cooking and serving. The relatives continuously bought out food, cigarettes and drinks for the guests. The banquet area was only small so guests stood around smoking and chatting while they waited for their turn

gifts. Eventually, the go-between and the bridegroom's family visit the brides' family together in order to deliver a final gift, which is called '*song dajiu*' (Yang 2008). If the bride's family gives their consent to the marriage, the two families commission a Daoist priest to determine a day for the ceremony. The day before the ceremony, the groom's kin and the go-between present the bride's parents with wine, pork, tea, and salt. To prepare the marriage bed, in the evening a divination is performed to decide the most auspicious direction for the positioning of the bed and it is decorated with walnuts, pignuts, dates, and cassia in each corner of the bed quilt (Chao 1996).

**Figure 3.2 A local Naxi wedding ceremony in Lijiang**



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2007

to eat. Once a round of guests were finished eating, helpers cleaned the table and served a new set of dishes for those waiting. Once the guests were finished eating, helpers cleaned the table and served a new set of dishes. This rotation continued throughout the day with the banquet running from lunch to dinner. I heard that friends of the couple intended to stay until evening to tease the bride in the bridal chamber – the customary *naohun* (teasing or ‘making turbulence’) of a Chinese wedding.<sup>52</sup>

Similar to the Dongba wedding ceremony, the family members and the go-between follow a certain script to arrange, prepare, and perform the wedding ceremony. Yet, in contrast to the traditional Naxi wedding that focuses on the separation of the bride from her natal family, and the establishment of a new household with the consent of the god Su, the Sinicized ceremony emphasizes the exchange of material goods and the alliance of the families of the bride and groom. The current system in Lijiang has thus become

<sup>52</sup> *Naohun*, also called *naodongfang*, is an important Chinese wedding ritual during which close friends of the bride and groom have some fun with the newlyweds in the bridal chamber to ease their mutual embarrassment before leaving them alone to consummate the marriage.

intertwined with the creation of social prestige associated with kinship hierarchy and material displays (Chao 1995).

### The 'Dongba Wedding' in the Courtyard

In recent years Dongba wedding traditions have regained popularity in the Naxi region, especially among tourists in search of traditional Dongba culture. One reason for the increase in popularity of Dongba wedding rituals is the development of Dongba-related theme parks in Lijiang. The theme parks employ young Dongbas to perform rituals for tourists at particular times of the day. These Dongbas, recently trained in Dongba culture centres, reconfigure the content and context of their ritual performances to meet the needs of global tourism and the modes of consumption that come with it. The Dongba rituals traditionally had a bodily purpose: they focused on expelling evil spirits or healing diseases. According to a scholar from the Dongba Culture Research Institute, the new genres of Dongba performances in these theme parks have altered the relationship between performers and audience. The rituals have become aesthetic exercises; their exterior modes of representation serve as exotic cultural shows that have nearly no other purpose than to entertain and generate cash.

The idea of redesigning and staging Dongba marriage ceremonies for tourists was not only inspired by Dongba-related theme parks, but also by an early example of a tourist style Dongba wedding in Lijiang between a foreign couple. In the early 1990s, anthropologist Charles McKhann came to Lijiang to conduct fieldwork on the Dongba rituals. Two years later, he married in the United States and brought his wife to Lijiang for a honeymoon. The couple decided to have a traditional Naxi wedding ceremony in the Old Town. The wedding was conducted by the Dongba He Jigui, a friend of McKhann and a well-known Dongba, who was working in the Dongba Culture Research Institute at the time. The couple invited family members, friends, colleagues, and scholars to Lijiang. During the wedding ceremony, they dressed in traditional Naxi clothes and participated in rituals that included the procession, the *suzu* ritual, and a celebratory dinner with friends.

As McKhann (2010: 196) wrote,

I assumed it would be a small affair [...] but Director Zhou saw immediately that the wedding would make good propaganda for the Dongba Institute, a way to highlight their work salvaging traditional Naxi religion. So my sister, Tricia, and I found a goat to sacrifice and Director Zhou got all

the other people and stuff together [...] and then he invited newspaper reporters and a television crew. [...] [After the big day] that night and for two following nights, we got to experience it all over again on television. Director Zhou had meant to promote the Dongba Institute before other Naxi cultural institutions in town, but by the time the county television station edited the piece, it was about foreigners coming to Lijiang and falling in love with each other incidentally, but mainly with Naxi culture.

After having undergone many transformations throughout history, McKhann's wedding celebration was the first time that the traditional Dongba ceremony had reappeared from the past, albeit in a reinvented form, with a foreign bride and groom as well as mass media broadcasting. This process of revision for mass (tourist) consumption continues today and the Dongba wedding tradition is constantly interpreted and adapted by Lijiang businesses and practitioners.

In the summer of 2012, when speaking to Mr. Liu, the manager of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, he confirmed that McKhann's wedding inspired his designing of the project:

When I got married in 2000, I recalled McKhann's wedding in Lijiang several years ago. I felt it was a great idea, so I asked a Dongba from the institute to conduct my wedding. In 2004, I became the first to provide traditional wedding performance to tourists, in the Dongba Kingdom. It was successful and welcomed by tourists, so the local government asked me to emulate this performance in the Old Town. For this reason, I opened the Naxi Wedding Courtyard in the town in 2007.

Mr. Liu believed that tourists come to Lijiang in search of an authentic and ethnic culture, different from what they experience at home (Chapter 2). As a cultural entrepreneur, he also understood the importance of tailoring the service to satisfy tourists' expectations. When designing the Naxi wedding services, he mixed the traditional Dongba and Sinicized Naxi wedding customs in order to highlight ethnic Naxi culture and the Dongba religion. He also invented many ethnic symbols and practices to strengthen the main theme of the service. The following is a representation of the programme provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard.

The service starts with a welcoming ceremony at the entrance of the town during which the moderator introduces tourists to the customs of a Naxi wedding and announces the opening of the ceremony. Actors dressed in traditional Naxi clothing perform the ritual welcoming, which involves

**Figure 3.3 Dongba Fuhua chants and throws rice into the river**



Photo: Provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard

singing, dancing and the guests being presented with the Golden Keys of Happiness. Following this, in a practice similar to the bridal procession in traditional Han Chinese weddings, the couple are guided by the Dongba, with the bride on horseback, accompanied by a band and a group of elderly Naxi women. The bridal procession, as well as the loud gong and the display of the dowry, are an important aspect of traditional Chinese weddings and serve to publicly demonstrate that the marriage is being performed correctly (Yang 1945). The gift of the Golden Keys of Happiness, however, does not occur in traditional or Sinicized Naxi weddings. Mr. Liu's company introduced this step in the welcoming ceremony as an opportunity to create tourist souvenirs. Similarly, proceeding on horseback is another invention of the company, included in order to evoke the caravans that once travelled through the region.

The tourist-guests are enthralled with the large bridal procession as it moves into Sifang Square in the centre of Old Town. Once in the square the Dongba Fuhua, who is the main actor guiding the performance, undertakes the second stage of the ceremony, the so called 'releasing of the fish'. In front of the large crowd, the Dongba releases golden fish into the river. The moderator explains that this ritual shows the new couple's great mercy and brings peace and greetings to the honoured guests. This stage of the ceremony is familiar to most Chinese tourists as the idea of 'setting lives free' is borrowed from Chinese Buddhism. Again, this stage of the ceremony does not exist in any traditional Naxi wedding practices.

After releasing the fish, the Dongba guides the procession across the Wanzi bridge as he chants and throws rice into the river. Crossing the bridge is a key part of the ceremony as it symbolizes the bride entering the groom's family. The Naxi people also believe that this stage will bless the future family with more offspring.

After crossing the bridge, the procession continues its journey towards the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. A group of actors posing as hosts wait outside the main entrance to welcome the new couple and the procession of performers and guests as they arrive in the courtyard. Pine branches are burnt in a firepot at the threshold of the entrance and the hosts lead guests as they step across the fire. This crossing, as the moderator explains, expels evils. This moment of dramatic theatre is inspired by the Dongbas' use of pine branches in traditional weddings to expel evil spirits. In a traditional Naxi wedding pine branches are placed around the fire pit in the middle of the house, not at the threshold.

Once the guests are seated, the host actors offer them tea, cigarettes and candy and the three course wedding banquet is served.<sup>53</sup> The first course is an appetizer of various snacks and sweets; the second course includes four small cold dishes and eight large hot dishes; the last course is a Naxi hot pot (a bronze pot of simmering broth in which vegetable, meat and other ingredients are cooked). Drinking is another essential component of the banquet; courtyard staff offer guests drinks including *baijiu* (a strong liquor), *meijiu* (a lighter, plum-flavoured homemade beverage), and orange juice.

While the guests are enjoying the wedding banquet in the courtyard, the main ceremony of the wedding takes place. It opens with a Naxi song—'Marrying Her Daughter' (*Jia nudiao*). A Naxi woman who plays the bride's mother sings the song while she brushes her daughter's hair; the music is mournful and expresses the mother's grief over her daughter leaving home. The performance was adapted from the Naxi tradition in which the bride and her mother sing this song in their home and cry in a special rhythm on the day of the wedding.<sup>54</sup> After the song, the Dongba invites the bride and groom into the main hall so that he can conduct the Su ritual. Finally, the Dongba presents the newly married couple with a wedding certificate written in Dongba characters.

53 Most of the food and hotpot dishes are designed to satisfy the Han tourists while retaining some of the characteristics common to Naxi cuisine.

54 The bride needs to learn this rhythm several months before the wedding.



**Figure 3.4** The actors toast the guests during the ceremony



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

Once the Su ritual is completed, the moderator directs the actors through songs, dances and interactive games with the guests. The singers and dancers walk around each table, toast the guests and invite them to join in dancing the *Remeicuo*. The couples and guests, guided by the performers, join hands and make a circle in the middle of the courtyard, swinging their arms back and forth and singing 'hey, hey, hey!' After several rounds of toasts, the banquet ends and the guests are invited to join the lantern lighting near the canal outside the courtyard. The couple then light a red lantern and release it into the flowing water to bring everlasting happiness. With the release of the lantern, the wedding ceremony closes.<sup>55</sup>

Of all the stages of the ceremony, Mr. Liu places most emphasis on the Dongba's ritual. In 2008, Mr. Liu hired Dongba Fuhua to host the Dongba wedding in the courtyard. The first task of Fuhua was to simplify the wedding ritual for the courtyard due to the limited resources of the company and tourists' demands.

In Fuhua's home village, Dongbas may chant six or seven scriptures, taking several hours to complete a wedding ritual. To fulfil the demands of

<sup>55</sup> The lantern is traditionally used on 15 July (the traditional Chinese calendar or Lunar Calendar). The ceremony is used to send off the spirits of one's ancestors and to invite roving ghosts to leave. The roving ghosts are spirits of those who died without descendants, who died a violent death, or who died without anyone seeing them die. Now the ritual is used in the wedding ceremony with a new romanticized association.



**Figure 3.5** The dancing of *Remeicuo* in the middle of the courtyard



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

the couples – mainly tourists and immigrants – Fuhua had shortened his scriptures into three-to-five-minute-long chants. Fuhua has shortened the ritual by leaving out the *suke* and *sumigong* rituals, since the courtyard is supposed to represent the groom's house and these rituals are performed in the bride's home. In the *suzu* ritual, Fuhua ties together the groom and the bride with a red string, similar to what he does in his own village. However, this part, which traditionally functions as 'tying the Su', has been reinterpreted by the moderator as a symbol of 'soul binding.' In addition, compared with the original scriptures Fuhua used for marriage rituals, the scriptures used in the courtyard are much simpler. Yet, the condensed scriptures still contain the most significant proceedings, such as expelling evil (*cuoziming*), lighting the lamps (*banmizhi*), offerings (*suluo*), inviting the gods (*suku gudi*), soul binding (*suzu*), and blessings (*sumaba*).

Fuhua explained the changes to me:

This is very different from what I do in the village. I do not have enough time. The couples would not like to kneel down for several hours in front of the altar. However, I do not just perform to please them. I am actually doing the ritual with a specific meaning. Perhaps some tourists regard my ritual merely as entertainment, but there is still a certain power during the performance.

**Figure 3.6** The Su basket used by Dongba Fuhua during wedding rituals



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

Fuhua further told me that he also asks the names and birthdays of the bride and groom before concluding the wedding. With this information, he subsequently conducts divination to see if the marriage will enjoy a bright future. According to Naxi tradition, divination with names and birthdays is an important procedure and it is required before a wedding. The results can help the Dongba to tell whether the power of Su is present or not.

Fuhua has contributed to the customization of the wedding ceremony by shortening and simplifying the scriptures. Yet Fuhua believes that the rituals in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard are as powerful as those he performs in his village. For Fuhua, the ritual performance is not only a job, something he does for a living; it is a platform for him to perform his Dongba identity. Through offerings, chanting, blessings and divination, Fuhua can judge whether two lives in a new household are able to merge.

Since 2010, Mr. Liu noticed that many tourists, especially women from Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, were mostly interested in the aspect of ethnic culture underlying the wedding ceremony while some companies were willing to book the service as part of their business trip in Lijiang. Accordingly, he made some changes to the service in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. In addition to offering real marriage ceremonies to couples, Mr. Liu arranges mock wedding performances and dinners for tourists. During these mock weddings, two staff members (a boy and a girl) perform the Naxi wedding ceremony in the courtyard. As the mock bride and groom, they ride horses from the entrance of the town into the courtyard. The

moderator welcomes them and explains the meaning of the Naxi wedding. The mock bride and groom take part in the *suzu* ritual conducted by the Dongba. During the wedding performance tourists sit around enjoying Naxi cuisine, masquerading as guests at an authentic wedding. Dongba Fuhua was frustrated about these changes, but his opinion was not taken into consideration.

## Conclusion

Culture is never fixed, but continuously evolving and contextually changing. In contemporary China, the state increasingly intervenes in this process of cultural evolution through regulation and marketization (Siu 1989). In the case of the World Heritage Site of Emei, for instance, the local government established the world's largest Samantabhadra statue to create a new 'scenic spot,' which would attract religious tourists and increase admission revenue (Zhu and Li 2013). Although ritual traditions have always been a local activity, in most cases their re-evaluation depends on the state-directed political economy that affects the allocation and distribution of cultural resources (Oakes 1993). The commodification of religion has turned these plural religious practices into a singular economic good and an object of desire in the market of faiths (Kitiarsa 2008; Oakes and Sutton 2010).

The issue is not the degree to which the commercialisation of performances alters the content of rituals, for rituals are constantly evolving. The primary issue is the centrality of power relations embedded in the reconstitutions of cultural traditions. It is more significant to identify who has the power to perform the cultural practices and define it as heritage, as well as who reaps the benefits of such transformation. In the various stages of cultural reconstitutions, the state uses authenticity as a tool to legitimize cultural revision and heritage making. Through translations, publications, and exhibitions, the state objectifies Dongba practices and transforms it into an orderly scientific knowledge of the Naxi past. Accordingly, religious practices have been reified into heritage objects that can be collected, isolated, and displayed at museums for inspection and appreciation.

Yet the state is not the sole player in this game; heritage and ethnic tourism also allows other actors – the entrepreneurs, the scholars, and the religious practitioners – to be involved in the revision and production of Dongba culture. They have all taken up active roles in this process of transforming cultural customs into a commodity. In this process, similar to other areas

of heritage tourism, rituals were shortened, embellished, or adopted to the tastes of the tourists, and thus tailored to an 'external public' (Boorstin 1992). As in the case of the Dongba pictographic scripts, art and craft products change in form, in material, or in colour to satisfy tourists' needs – a process I have called customization.

Such process of transformation is often interpreted in a negative manner. In Greenwood's study of the public ritual of the Alarde in the Spanish Basque town Fuenterrabía, a popular tourism attraction, he indicates that because the local ritual was reoriented to suit tourists, the locals became unwilling to participate: 'The ritual has turned into a performance for outsiders to gain money. The meaning is gone' (1977: 135).

However, other scholars have moved away from interpretations of such staged performances as 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin 1992) towards understanding these performances as incorporating new meanings that emerge during performance and interactions. Cohen (1988), for instance, argued that commodification does not necessarily destroy the meaning of a cultural product for either locals or tourists. In particular, he asserts that tourist-oriented products frequently acquire new meanings for the locals, as they become a diacritical mark of their ethnic or cultural identity. 'Old meanings do not thereby necessarily disappear, but may remain silent, on a different level, for an internal public, despite commodification' (Cohen 1988: 383).

In the case of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, many locals attach new meanings to these transformed cultural practices: for instance, the religious practitioner Fuhua still believes in the ritual's efficacy, while Mr. Liu takes pride in presenting an 'authentic' Naxi wedding ceremony to tourists. It is moreover the involvement and performance of these local actors that bestow the cultural practices with a sense of authenticity. In this regard, organized cultural performances might provide opportunities for local people to learn more about themselves, thus increasing feelings of pride in their cultural heritage and a heightened perception of their own worth (Edgell 1990).

So what are the actual effects of cultural customization on these local actors? Does such a process lead to value erosion of local culture as Greenwood (1977) argued, or does it offer new meanings, as Cohen (1988) claimed? This is a complicated question, because each actor plays different roles and interprets this process differently, depending on their own interests and relations to the place. A further examination is necessary, not only of the practice itself, but, more importantly, of the life stories of each actor and their engagement with the Naxi Wedding Courtyard.



## 4 Local Actors

As performers we are merchants of morality. Our day is given over to intimate contact with the goods we display and our minds are filled with intimate understandings of them; but it may well be that the more attention we give to these goods, then the more distance we feel from them and from those who are believing enough to buy them.  
– Goffman (1959: 251)

To maintain the daily operation of the wedding ceremony in the courtyard involves other work. Mr. Liu recruited several local tourism workers, including the ritual performer (Dongba Fuhua), the moderator (Mei), the dancer (Chao), and a number of other part-time workers. Each has become an actor in the daily enactments of the wedding service in the courtyard. In addition to conducting the Dongba ritual, they also engage in, for instance, decorating, photographing, banquet arranging, serving and cleaning. To set the scene for the tourists' wedding experience, discussed in the next chapter, this chapter unpacks the sequence of the wedding performances by examining some of these local actors working in the courtyard, the histories that bring them to this performance, and its role in their identities and life trajectories.

To call them 'actors' is both metaphoric and real. They perform an ethnic wedding as a paid service for tourists. They also perform their own identities and search for a better life under the backdrop of the dramatic development of the heritage industry in Lijiang. The stage of the courtyard serves as a social reflection of everyday life of Lijiang where people visit and stay, as well as create and search for different meanings. Although most of the people introduced here are officially categorized as 'Naxi' in state narratives, each individual has fluid responses to, and engagements with, their ethnic identity. Such fluidity is reflected in their different genders, personal memories, individual relations with their pasts, and visions of the future.

These local actors are producers of Naxi culture. They are intrinsically motivated to customize their heritage to satisfy tourists' demands by wrapping modern cultural objects and performances in the décor of their ancient past. Yet, this customized form of heritage influences their response to the reinvented built environment in their daily life. Through embracing cultural change in the process of customization, they become further disconnected from their own heritage.

**Figure 4.1** The local actors at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard



Photo: Provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard

### **The Manager, Mr. Liu**

Since the early 1990s, several Naxi entrepreneurs have embraced the state-endorsed vision of heritage tourism in Lijiang. Because of the international acclaim of Naxi traditions, the government started to encourage local minorities to develop their own distinct art forms, emphasizing local presentations of a self-conscious identity. These presentations attract more tourists to the town and generate significant revenues. In this process, some Naxi entrepreneurs have labelled themselves as the ambassadors of Naxi culture and utilized the tourism market to stimulate their community's socio-economic development. In contrast to outsiders, they claim the social and political responsibility of safeguarding Naxi heritage, and thereby get more support from the local authorities.

Mr. Liu, who manages the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, is one of these local Naxi entrepreneurs. He developed his interest in ethnic culture and tourism during his studies in Kunming. In the early 1990s, Mr. Liu went to Kunming to study at the International Modern Art Institute of Yunnan University. During this time, Yunnan was among the first provinces to develop ethnic tourism in China. Being the capital of the province, Kunming facilitated

different tourism products concerning ethnic customs, music, festivals, and handicrafts. Mr. Liu told me, 'My major was in advertising, and I am very interested in the visualization of traditional ethnic culture. I am always keen to see how others present their ethnic culture in different forms.' For this reason, the Yunnan Ethnic Village and the Stone Forest became some of his favourite places to visit during his weekends.<sup>56</sup> He also chose to design ethnic souvenirs as his study project.

Mr. Liu went back to Lijiang in 1997, two years after his graduation. He quit his job in a marketing company in Kunming to take care of his mother, who suffered from a chronic disease. After going back to Lijiang, he initially established an advertising agency, but the business closed down after one year, leaving him heavily in debt. The business failure and the family burden made him desperate to find new employment opportunities in his hometown.

One day in 1999, Mr. Liu participated in a meeting organized by the local Tourism Bureau. The officials from the Tourism Bureau introduced the idea of cultural industry, a concept China adopted from UNESCO and other international organizations, as a new tool for promoting cultural diversity and economic development. After the meeting, Mr. Liu became active in the development of local cultural industry. He explained to me how he was fortunate to launch his Naxi Cultural Industry Company and build connections with the Heritage Bureau at the early stage of his business:

At that time, Lijiang was nominated as a World Heritage Site, and became a destination for thousands of Chinese tourists. I thought, under these circumstances the cultural industry has a promising potential, so I started to seek opportunities and business partners in this field. My chance to be part of the industry finally came – I borrowed some money from friends and started a new company in 1999. I named my company the 'Naxi Cultural Industry Company' to create a business model for promoting the traditional Naxi culture. I still remember that I started my business with only three employees. We rented a very small apartment near the Old Town, and brought some of our own furniture and kitchenware. The most valuable assets of the company were a computer and a digital camera. At the very beginning, we designed traditional Naxi souvenirs and tried

56 The Yunnan Ethnic Village is a theme park displaying various cultural performances and architecture replica of ethnic groups residing in Yunnan Province. Located in Yi Autonomous County, the Stone Forest (*Shilin*) is a World Heritage Site in which the Sani people, a part of the Yi minority, live.



very hard to sell them to local shops. Unfortunately, these tailor-made products were not much in demand. Most shop owners preferred to import so called 'ethnic handicrafts' from Fujian and Zhejiang Province, although they were low-priced products lacking originality and creativity from my point of view.

Liu's story illustrates broader trends at a time when the party-state strongly encouraged Chinese people to start their own business. A number of people, including scholars and factory workers, quit their stable jobs in state-owned enterprises and established businesses, a phenomenon phrased as *xiahai* (plunging into business sea). As a local Naxi, Mr. Liu has witnessed changes the tourism industry has brought to his hometown. He was able to identify business opportunities in promoting Naxi culture as both a resource for profit-making and a way of presenting his ethnic identity. As he recalled,

On one occasion, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the Heritage Bureau on developing some creative heritage projects. I got inspired from our Naxi tradition 'floating river lanterns,' so I designed a bunch of white paper lanterns, and put forward a slogan 'Lightening a river lantern, making a dream come true' [*Yizhan lianhuadeng, yige xinyuan*]. In the evening, tourists lit these paper lanterns and floated them down the canal of the Old Town. You can imagine what a beautiful and romantic sight these lanterns made in the canal! This project was a big success, and these lanterns soon became very popular souvenirs.

Mr. Liu knew very well how a close relationship with the government would aid his business affairs. He spent a lot of time having dinners, drinking, and playing *mahjong* with government officials, according to him, 'to make good friends with them.' Playing *mahjong* is the most popular leisure activity in Lijiang. Government officials often play *mahjong* after work or even during the two-hour lunch break on weekdays. On many occasions, the senior official would play with his subordinates, while others were sitting around them, smoking, drinking tea, and chatting. The officials then often talked about things related to their work. For Mr. Liu, there is no better way of collecting information than sitting around and listening to the informal talk among officials.

Since the early 2000s, Mr. Liu's company has closely worked with Lijiang's government to design and develop a number of cultural ceremonial events. This includes the first and second Dongba Cultural Art Festival (1999, 2003), and the ten-year memorial of the Lijiang earthquake in 2006. In addition,

the company has become a close business partner of the Heritage Bureau and has established tourism service centres in different entrances of the town. These centres provide tour guide services and sell souvenirs.

Mr. Liu became obsessed with promoting Naxi tradition and ethnic culture through his business. As a member of the Naxi Cultural Association, the coordinator of Lijiang Cultural Industry Association, the manager of a regional football club and the director of his company, he was able to take advantage of his various positions to facilitate communication between Lijiang and the outside world in the heritage sectors. He has participated in promoting Naxi culture in several domestic and international exhibitions, including the annual China Tourism Exposition, where representatives from over 50 historic towns promote their culture heritage. He has also been active in the media industry, for instance, by supporting the design of documentaries, TV series, and movies relevant to Naxi and Dongba culture. In addition, he designed cartoons about folklore stories of 26 ethnic groups in Yunnan for educational purposes.

Mr. Liu's enthusiasm for Naxi tradition inspired him to develop a Naxi cultural exhibition to showcase Naxi culture and Dongba religion. He started the exhibition in 2005 as a part of his tourism business project Dongba Kingdom (*Dongba Wangguo*), a theme park located 20 kilometres outside of Lijiang at the foot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Dongba religion was adopted as the main theme of the cultural park. Following the 2003 listing of Dongba literature manuscripts on the Memory of the World Register by UNESCO, he designed and built a 99-metre-long wall with ancient Dongba scripts to illustrate the origin of the Naxi people and the cosmology of Dongba religion. In the park, he also established a Naxi village where ten exhibition houses display various themes of Naxi culture.

The Heritage Bureau realized the potential value of the project and encouraged Mr. Liu to develop a cultural exhibition of Naxi life in Lijiang's Old Town, which ultimately became the 'Encountering a Naxi Family' project (*Zoujin naxi renjia*) (Chapter 2). The Heritage Bureau supported the project as a way to enhance heritage development and increase the area's global profile – but it also expected to earn revenue from the project. Profits were to be shared between Mr. Liu's company and the Heritage Bureau. However, the director of the Heritage Bureau was not satisfied with Mr. Liu's performance because the company did not produce sufficient revenue. The income barely covered the salaries of the tourism workers and other costs like advertising and marketing.

Mr. Liu had a different opinion regarding the management of 'Encountering a Naxi Family.' According to Mr. Liu, the courtyards displayed in the

'Encountering a Naxi Family' project should not be regarded as a 'money tree.' Instead of focusing the project on generating revenue from tourists, he made most of the courtyards' exhibitions free of charge. Mr. Liu also invited local Naxi to learn the cultural traditions displayed in these houses. As he had to pay salaries and maintenance fees, there was relatively little revenue to share with the Heritage Bureau. Mr. Liu knew that he had to rectify the situation and increase the revenue coming from the project – otherwise he would lose his long-term contract.

Mr. Liu's management of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard exemplifies the dilemma in developing his tourism business in Lijiang. On the one hand, as a Naxi businessman, he has to compete with entrepreneurs from other cities who have better knowledge and business skills. He learned the heritage discourses of 'authenticity,' 'ethnicity,' and 'romance' from the officials of the Heritage Bureau to promote his business. On the other hand, as a local Naxi, he has witnessed the dramatic change of his hometown over the last few decades, especially the impact of the tourist industry on Naxi culture. From the perspective of heritage experts, his business approach might fall into the same basket of commercialization or 'invention of tradition' as the businesses he has criticized. However, Mr. Liu still insists on his way of managing the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, despite the pressure he has received from the Heritage Bureau. In this sense, his endeavour to promote local culture was not only a marketing strategy, but also a manifestation of his pleasure in being a Naxi from Lijiang. Such a dilemma results in his continuous struggle between pride (his Naxi identity) and price (economic benefits).

### **The Dongba, Fuhua**

The Naxi wedding performance in the courtyard cannot exist without Fuhua, the performer of the Dongba wedding rituals (Chapter 3). He enjoys telling me his stories, although he has rarely mentioned it to any of his colleagues. Fuhua told me about his father, the tragedy of his family during the Cultural Revolution, his pride in being a Dongba, and his intention to promote Dongba culture today. Fuhua recounted his stories with an emotional outpouring that was absent from his rituals.

Born in the 1960s in Shuming, a mountain village 150 kilometres northwest of Lijiang, Fuhua was raised in a family highly respected by the local community since his father, uncle, and grandfather were all Dongbas. With the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Dongba practices were discouraged, yet Shuming was among the few remote areas in the Naxi homeland to

maintain the long-standing Naxi ceremonies. When Fuhua was a child, his father worked as a Dongba, conducting rituals for the local community and its residents. At the age of seven, Fuhua himself began to receive instruction in the texts of religious performances. He learned from his father and uncle by participating in their religious practices.

Fuhua had to stop his Dongba training during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and was prevented from training with his father:

It was a nightmare. My father used to be respected by villagers as the representative to our gods, but suddenly everything changed. No more rituals and ceremonies. No more friends visiting our family. All classical documents and instruments inherited from our ancestors were destroyed.

In 1983, after attending a Dongba workshop organized by the local government, Fuhua's father devoted himself to promoting the revival of Dongba rituals in Shuming. He launched a training project with his brother and taught a number of young people Dongba rituals. The village became one of the first in Lijiang to revive the Dongba practices. Yang Fuquan, a Naxi ethnographer familiar with Fuhua's family and their village, told me,

Fuhua's father was a very good Dongba. He suffered a lot during the Cultural Revolution but made huge efforts to revive Dongba culture. When he died in 1992, many Dongbas from all around the Lijiang plain came and participated in his death ritual with deep and sincere respect. I talked to Fuhua several times about inheriting his father's work. I am happy that he did it.

Since the late 1980s, Lijiang's local government has supported many training projects to revive Dongba culture; the village of Shuming has become one of the pioneers. Fuhua participated in training with other young Dongba students after his father's death. To be a Dongba, students are expected to acquire skills through a long apprenticeship under the guidance of senior Dongbas. However, Fuhua was encouraged to get more systematic training in Lijiang in order to become an officially recognized Dongba. For this reason, he left his village in 2000 and began training in the Dongba Culture Research Institute.

Having learned some practices in Shuming at an early age, Fuhua spent five years studying in the institute. During his apprenticeship, Fuhua was often invited to return to his village to conduct rituals for marriage ceremonies. In addition, since the early 2000s, an increasing number of overseas scholars have come to Lijiang to research Dongba culture. Some became

acquainted with Fuhua and asked him about Dongba scripts, paintings, and music.

In 2005, when Fuhua graduated from the Dongba Culture Research Institute, he had already settled in Lijiang, with his two daughters studying at local schools. He decided to search for employment in Lijiang instead of returning to his home village. As a member of a Dongba family from a mountain village yet trained in the official Dongba Institute, Fuhua met the social requirement of what constituted a 'real' Dongba. More importantly, although the institutionalized training was distinct from the traditional Dongba practices in his village, ongoing incorporation within society allowed him to be a 'real' Dongba adapting to an authorized and social standard.

According to Prof. Ming, a Dongba scholar at the institute,

The systematic training in the institute helps them chant and write Dongba texts and transform their Dongba knowledge into rituals. Compared to many so-called Dongbas in the tourism market who just know how to write some texts, they are more qualified.

When Fuhua first started looking for jobs, a number of souvenir shops invited him to design tourism products mixing Dongba script with Chinese characters. Fuhua refused; he wanted to be a practicing Dongba. Later, Fuhua received job offers from the Dongba Palace, the Jade Water Valley, and the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. Jade Water Valley is a commercial theme park in Lijiang. It hires Dongbas to perform religious dances, write texts, or conduct rituals on specific days. Even though the salary offered was higher, Fuhua chose to work for the Naxi Wedding Courtyard that was supported by the local government. He said,

I don't like the investors of Dongba Palace and Jade Water Village. Although they proclaim themselves to be real lovers of Dongba culture, Dongbas are forced to dance and perform at the investors' wish to amuse tourists. Obviously, they are still profit-driven businessmen. In contrast, the manager of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard seems more sincere because he respects me and asks me to do Dongba rituals the way I like.

The process of Fuhua's search for employment illustrates to some extent his ongoing pursuit of being a 'real' Dongba. Tourism helps the Dongba find a new meaning in his practice, continue his local identity, and distinguish himself from the invented tradition of Dongba culture (Cohen 1988). Fuhua sought work in the tourism industry for a living, but his decision to work

**Figure 4.2 Dongba Fuhua in the courtyard**



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2009

for the Naxi Wedding Courtyard was based on his understanding of what a ‘real’ Dongba should be. Fuhua prefers jobs that are officially recognized. Indeed, Mr. Liu, the manager of the courtyard explained that he needs a Dongba exactly like Fuhua, a practitioner from a Dongba family in a remote village and a graduate from the institute.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Fuhua shortened his ritual in the wedding performance to satisfy the needs of modern consumption. Yet Fuhua still believes that he has the power to identify whether some of the rituals are as effective as the ones he performs in the villages. His self-confidence as a Dongba allows him to amend the rituals in a way he chooses and to still consider them authentic. The ritual Fuhua conducts not only offers spiritual and aesthetic nourishment for tourists; such an adaptation for the sake of the tourism industry also enhances his will to perform and demonstrate his Dongba identity for social recognition.

Yet, Fuhua sometimes also feels frustrated. In 2008, Fuhua set up the altar in the centre of the courtyard beside a fire pit. However, in 2009, the Lijiang Heritage Bureau ordered the company to take out the fire pit and restore the courtyard in a manner that reflects the Naxi traditional way of living. As the heritage expert from the Bureau explained, the courtyard, one of the 'Encountering a Naxi Family' sites, needs to strictly follow the style of authentic Naxi houses. Accordingly, the altar needs to be relocated to the interior part of the main hall. Fuhua was not happy about the changes, because the relocated altar, hidden inside the main hall, affects his performance of the wedding ritual. He expressed his frustration to me and argued that,

As a Dongba, I am a teacher. This is why I keep telling them what I think is correct. However, my attempts at changing their attitudes have thus far been futile. They [the officials] do not really understand our culture. [...] Even foreigners like Meng Cheli [the Chinese name of Charles McKhann] respect my work. Meng and I were good friends for years. He just visited Lijiang this year with his students for a summer camp. He even invited me to his student workshop.

To a certain extent, Fuhua feels powerless when it comes to the extent to which he can manage his performance in the courtyard and to defend his competence as a Dongba. Fuhua does not live outside the space of state hegemony; indeed, his identity is constructed through his consistent interaction and negotiation with it. His life course has been strongly influenced by the pursuit of his Dongba identity and his motivation to be recognized by the society.

### **The Adviser, Prof. Ming**

Similar to Fuhua, some of other actors of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard also have an intrinsic motivation to safeguard and promote Naxi culture. As a well-known scholar on Dongba culture, Prof. Ming has worked as a researcher at the Dongba Cultural Research Institute for more than 20 years. Since a number of old Dongbas have passed away, and researchers from the Dongba Cultural Institute have retired, not many knowledgeable Dongba scholars like Prof. Ming still actively work in Lijiang. Studying with big Dongbas in 1990s, Prof. Ming learned a number of Dongba ceremonies and dances. As a local Naxi heritage expert, he is active in the conservation and heritage transmission of local Naxi culture. In addition to his research at the institute,



Prof. Ming also trains young Dongba apprentices, so they are able to work in the tourism industry as trained Dongbas. He established a Naxi cultural inheritance programme where students can actively participate in the local cultural activities including the Dongba Cultural Art Festival in 1999.

In recent years, a number of Dongba culture-related theme parks have been developed around Lijiang; many of them invited Prof. Ming to act as an adviser. In the beginning, he was passionate about such advisory work as he was able to promote Dongba culture while also recommending his students to work in these theme parks after their graduation. Yet later he became very disappointed. As he explained to me,

Currently a number of fake Dongba work in Lijiang, and they do not really respect any Dongba culture. Many of them just use the name of Dongba as a selling point for business. Training is very important. Even though they need to adapt to the modern demands, they can still maintain the spirit of Dongba culture, which refers to the relation between nature and humankind.

Prof. Ming regards himself as teacher and guardian of Dongba culture. Being an acquaintance of Prof. Ming for years, Mr. Liu often asked him for advice on designing his cultural industry projects. Prof. Ming also taught Fuhua as one of his first students at the institute. Yet, Prof. Ming rarely met him after Fuhua worked at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard.

One day I invited Prof. Ming to the courtyard. A couple had booked the wedding service during their honeymoon trip. When we arrived, the service had just started. We sat down in a corner without informing Fuhua. After the wedding ritual ended and the tourists started to participate in dancing and singing, Fuhua recognized us and immediately walked to our table. Fuhua first smiled and greeted us. He expressed courtesy to his teacher in the Naxi tradition by offering a cigarette and serving tea.<sup>57</sup> Then he sat down beside us and started to chat. In contrast to our previous interactions, Fuhua displayed a different behaviour towards me. Usually he spoke in the Yunnan dialect when he talked with me; yet this time he shifted to the Naxi language with his teacher. Later, Prof. Ming told me that Fuhua kept explaining that the work in the courtyard was not a formal ritual, but only a form of performance for tourists. Instead of criticizing Fuhua, Prof. Ming comforted him and gave him some trivial suggestions. We kept chatting until

57 In Naxi society, Naxi men often greet each other by offering cigarettes. The order of who gives whom the cigarette depends on their age and position in the societal hierarchy.



the service ended. When Fuhua said farewell to us outside the courtyard, he seemed to be relieved, like a student who had just finished his exam.

After Prof. Ming left the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, Fuhua brought up the subject of his teacher, and asked me,

Has Prof. Ming said something bad about me? Do not listen to him. He [Prof. Ming] is just a scholar, not really a Dongba. I know he has profound knowledge, but he does not really understand how to do a ritual in the contemporary world. This is my place, not the institute.

According to the Dongba religion, tradition and knowledge is only realized through Dongbas, not through scholars. Even though Prof. Ming's social position and expertise makes the Dongba feel inferior and insecure, Fuhua still feels that he has the agency to perform the wedding rituals as he sees fit. His statement, 'This is my place, not the institute,' demonstrates Fuhua's attempt to defend his Dongba identity and legitimizes the efficacy of his ritual, even though he is aware that he has in fact made significant changes to the traditional wedding ritual for the sake of tourist consumption.

Later, I had a conversation with Prof. Ming about Fuhua's performance and he said,

Fuhua's performance in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is fine since he kept the main elements of the ritual, such as burning the sacred lamp and incense, using butter during his blessings and arranging the Su basket. Although Dongba rituals have always been a performing art, the wedding ritual is still different from the one in the villages because the relationship between participants – actors and audiences – changes.

Prof. Ming further stated that a good Dongba should be able to create a powerful sacred space. He was not satisfied with Fuhua's chanting since, according to him, it was not powerful enough. In his opinion, chanting, as an essential way of expressing the texts, enhances the Dongba's role as a mediator between the world of the humans and the realm of the spirits. Ritual efficacy is based on the belonging of each spiritual being to a particular rate of vibration. This kind of vibration is reformulated and reproduced as sound, 'giving the Dongba power to invite particular spirits,' as Prof. Ming claims. In the climax of the ritual, the transformative effect of sound enables the Dongba to place himself in the centre of the performance.

As both a researcher and a practitioner, Prof. Ming understands that culture is never still but consistently changing. As a person who has witnessed

the transformations of Dongba religion in recent decades, he admits that it is not possible to freeze them in time. Yet his mission is to preserve traditional Dongba culture and steer the development of Dongba performance in Lijiang. In doing so, his personal experiences and memories, his social recognition as a scholar and teacher, as well as his everyday interactions with other local actors, all feed in to the commercialization of Dongba culture in Lijiang. Just as with Mr. Liu and Fuhua, Prof. Ming's identity is strongly based on his role as a scholar, teacher, and preserver of Dongba culture – a role he continues to perform in social interactions.

### **The Moderator, Mei**

Both traditional and Sinicized Naxi weddings do not require a moderator. In traditional weddings, the ceremony is conducted by Dongbas, while in contemporary Naxi weddings the groom's parents host the ceremony. In contrast to Naxi weddings, modern Chinese wedding ceremonies and banquets, especially in urban areas, often take place in a lavish restaurant. Similar to a master of ceremonies in Western weddings, such ceremonies require a moderator who directs the wedding performance and offers speeches complimenting the couple and the family. To tailor the ceremonies held at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard to a Chinese taste, Mr. Liu recruited Mei as the moderator for the wedding performance.

Mei is not new to the business. She used to work at the Lijiang Tourism Service Centre. Located at the entrance of the town, the centre organizes regional tours, provides specialist guides, and sells souvenirs and tickets to tourists. After being trained by the Lijiang Tourism Bureau, Mei worked as a certified tour guide at the centre. As an attractive Naxi girl, male Chinese tourists have often tried to flirt with Mei during her tour. Being shy and at times even speechless during the early years of her career, Mei has gradually become accustomed to such behaviour and has developed a talent for communicating with tourists. She has often been awarded for being one of the best tour guides of the centre. As her supervisor, Mr. Liu recognized Mei's talent, and transferred her to the position in the courtyard in 2008. Her first task was to create a short promotional film about the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. In the video, Mei acted as the bride, smiling and riding horses while crossing the streets of the town. This image has become the most important promotional material for advertising the courtyard.

As the moderator, one of the main tasks of Mei is to introduce the traditional Naxi wedding and rituals. She wrote the opening speech and

**Figure 4.3** The promotional photo about the wedding ceremony



Photo: Provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard

highlighted the links between the Dongba wedding and the idea of romance (as shown in Chapter 1). Mei's role as the moderator made the wedding ceremony more interactive for the guests. Mei often entertains the couples and guests by adding some jokes in her speech. To motivate tourists to participate in her games, she often told them, 'don't be shy, please join us, *pangjinge* [Naxi for 'boys'], you might find a *pangjinmei* here [Naxi for 'girls']'. Or sometimes, she asked the male tourists directly, 'Have you had any romantic encounters [*yanyu*] in Lijiang?' Similar jokes often appear in the *naohun* session of the Han Chinese wedding ceremonies.

In addition, Mei designed games for the couples and guests to participate in the entertaining part of the ceremony. As she explained, all guests enjoy watching or participating in these games, because in Chinese marriages, teasing the couple has become a significant activity during the marriage ceremony.<sup>58</sup> As a part of the entertaining games, the Naxi *leba* dance is

58 Han Chinese generally derive pleasure from playing games to embarrass the bride and groom. The group might urge the new couple to kiss or hug, to perform cross-armed toasting (*jiaobeijiu*), or to bite an apple with their hands tied. Emphasis is placed on the communication between hosts and guests, and the custom is regarded as symbolically affirming the patriarchy of the groom's family (Kipnis 1997).

**Figure 4.4** The Naxi *leba* dance in the wedding ceremony



Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2012

performed. The dance originated in Tacheng County where Dongbas ring a hand drum and bell to worship gods and expel evils. The dancers wear costumes representing various animals that are recorded in the Dongba scripts, such as a white crane, frog, dragon, and lion. As the moderator, Mei asked the tourists to watch the dance and guess which animals have been performed.

Mei: Which kind of animal has danced?

Guest A: A frog?

Mei: A frog? [To all the guests] Do you think he is right? [Guests applaud and say yes]

Mei: Congratulations, you are right! As a reward, can you imitate the frog and dance around the fire pit? You know how frogs dance, right?

[Accompanied by the laughing of all the other guests, the person hopped around the fire pit like a frog.]

Mei [to the other guests]: My distinguished guests, are you satisfied with this frog? [...] Oh no, it seems that other guests are not happy with your performance. What can we do? Mmm, my friend, how about singing a song for us?

When I asked Mei why she introduced so many games into the wedding ceremony, she told me she does this to make the ceremony 'fun and lively.' 'Yes, the Dongba ritual is sacred and can demonstrate the essence of Naxi culture, but it is too serious. Most of our guests are urban Han Chinese. They prefer something fun, so I designed some games to create a more lively atmosphere,' she said.

By looking at Han wedding ceremonies, Mei learned to design games that encourage visitors to participate in the ceremony. From Mei's point of view, a pure Dongba wedding is sacred but not real (*zhen*). 'It is so far from real life. If we add some funny games and some elements tourists are familiar with, I am sure they will be happier and more comfortable,' she explained.

Yet, not everyone is happy about Mei's perception of authenticity and her strategy of tailoring the wedding ceremony for tourists' comfort and enjoyment. One change Mei made in her description of the origin of the Naxi ethnic group was particularly controversial. According to the Dongba scriptures, one of the ancestors of humanity, *Chongrenlien*, married a fairy from heaven, *Cunhengbaobai*, and had three sons by her. The eldest son became the forefather of the Tibetan group; the second became the ancestor of the Naxi group; and the third of the Bai group. However, in Mei's opening speech, she claimed that Naxi are decedents of the first son of *Chongrenlien*. She argues that this 'small change' elevated the social position of the Naxi group and impresses her audience.

Although Dongba Fuhua was not happy about this change and repeatedly told Mei this was untrue, Mei insisted on introducing the origin of the Naxi people in this way. 'He [Fuhua] is of course an authority on the Dongba ritual, but he has no idea how to promote the Dongba culture to tourists or how to satisfy them,' Mei said. 'I am the moderator. I know how to meet their expectations and make them happy.'

In her study of ethnic tourism in southwest China, Jenny Chio (2014) showed that ethnic minority girls often use stereotypes to 'sweet talk' male tourists 'into a world of appearances that reaffirmed existing power asymmetries [...] tinged with a modern desire for the commoditization and consumption of ethnic minority identity' (Chio 2014: 155). Here Mei pursues a similar strategy of customization to tailor Naxi culture to the Han Chinese tourists' desire for romantic consumption. In contrast to the Dongba Fuhua who insists on demonstrating his belief in Dongba religion, Mei plays the role of mediating between Chinese tourism and ethnic tradition. To do so, Mei changes the setting of the wedding to satisfy the guests and to make them feel happier.

## The Dancer, Chao

Including Mei, there are in total seven workers in the courtyard, four women and three men. These tourism workers are in their 20s and 30s, and most grew up in the Naxi villages surrounding Lijiang. The roles available to these workers vary, depending on their gender and former work experience. The women often performed on the stage; they were in charge of dancing, singing, moderating, and serving the food. Li, for instance, worked as a dance designer in the courtyard. She selected certain Naxi music, choreographed the Naxi ethnic dance, and trained other staff every afternoon as part of preparing the performance. Fang, on the other hand, worked as an accountant. She regularly reported to Mr. Liu on the financial situation of the business. The male workers in the courtyard had a variety of responsibilities. Long, for instance, a Naxi boy from a local village, helped other colleagues during the ceremony by serving the food or participating in the Naxi dance when others were on leave.

Among the employees of the courtyard, Chao, a male dancer, stands out as he is not of Naxi descent but is Han Chinese. Chao was born in a Naxi village close to Lijiang and has worked in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard since 2008. Chao did not go to high school since he left home at the age of seventeen to make a living in Kunming. Back then, he started to work in the Yunnan Ethnic Village. In this theme park, the ethnic culture of Chinese minority groups is displayed in a stereotypical manner. As Chao recalled:

I worked there for five years. I performed in different ethnic villages at the park. It was funny since every day I dressed in different clothes, and sang different ethnic songs in these villages. I performed as Naxi, Bai, Dai and Yi. [...] Every day I had a different name.

In 2005, Chao returned to Lijiang because he believed the rapid tourism development of the town would offer him more opportunities. More importantly, as Chao explained, 'you won't find a place like Lijiang that has such a pretty blue sky and clear water.' Chao soon stated to work as a dancer in *Lishui Jinsha*, a large-scale tourist performance that presents a representational narrative of Naxi identity and religion through dances and songs. After two years dancing in the *Lishui Jinsha* performance, Chao was able to earn more than 2,000 *yuan* per month, a salary much higher than the average income in Lijiang. Chao was happy about his decision to return to Lijiang. However, he decided to leave *Lishui Jinsha* after a conversation with Mr. Liu. As Chao remembered:

One day Mr. Liu came to me and asked if I would like to work for him. He tried to convince me that I could not keep on dancing all my life and that working for him could be a promising job opportunity with a lot of potential. I have to admit that he was right. I don't know how long I will be able to dance, as I am getting older and older. However, it was a hard decision since the salary was really low. He was only able to offer me 1,200 *yuan*.<sup>59</sup> I was inspired by the story of his early career days and how he worked hard to achieve his success. He told me that 'It does not matter if we don't earn money now as long as we are learning things. Keep working hard, and one day you will become successful like me.'

Well, I know Mr. Liu is a very influential and successful entrepreneur. His words seemed promising, because I would also like to be successful and establish my own business in the future. So, I decided to leave my former job and work for the Naxi Wedding Courtyard.

After working with the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, Chao started dreaming of a brighter future and a successful career. Mr. Liu promised Chao that if he worked hard in the Wedding Courtyard, his company will help Chao realise his dream of success, a promise Chao expects to be fulfilled. In addition to designing various traditional dances for the wedding service, Chao also learned photography and video-making. In recent years, wedding photography has become a thriving business in China. Couples marrying in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard often come on their own, and are unable to take pictures by themselves. With permission from Mr. Liu, Chao arranged for couples to have the option to have photos taken during the Dongba rituals and ceremonies. The photos are then ready the day after the ceremony so couples can take them back home and show them to their relatives and friends.

Chao also promoted the service on social media. He opened an account on Weibo, a Chinese social network site, where he advertised the service to the public. With permission from the customers, he often posted and shared wedding photos of the ceremonies on the media page. By working on marketing and promotion of the wedding ritual to tourists, he not only made use of the growing popularity of social media in China, but also linked the courtyard and himself to the 'outside' modern world.

In the summer of 2011, Chao married a Naxi woman, from a village 15 kilometres away from Lijiang. They arranged the ceremony and banquet at

59 This salary was not sufficient for him to live independently in Lijiang, due to the increase in the cost of living as a result of the development of the tourism industry.



**Figure 4.5** Chao's wedding in the courtyard

Photo: Yujie Zhu, 2011

their village. Mr. Liu subsequently suggested arranging another ceremony at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, because it would be a good opportunity to promote his business. Chao accepted Liu's invitation, and asked all his friends, relatives, and colleagues to dress in Western-style clothing instead of the Naxi traditional clothes, as they usually do at weddings. As Chao explained, 'this was to differentiate it from their daily work.'

Since 2010, at Mr. Liu's request, Chao has worked as a mock groom during the performance service and dinners (see Chapter 3). On the day of Chao's actual wedding, when he walked back to the courtyard, many shop owners recognized him as the performer playing the groom who often accompanies the wedding party to the courtyard. Chao had to stop and keep telling them that this was indeed his own wedding, not a performance. After the wedding day, Chao was very keen to tell me about his experiences, as it reflected so many aspects of his work:

The procession to the courtyard was funny. You know what? In order to tell if it's a real wedding or not, some shop owners followed us and attended my wedding. Other than that, the ceremony in the courtyard



that day was really special to me. We all dressed up in Western wedding suits, but we did the same dance and Dongba ritual as we have performed a hundred times. I don't feel that this is a performance. It's my wedding and an important moment of my life. Many of my friends and colleagues were there. They blessed us and we drank a lot.

Mr. Liu invited his friends to participate in the ceremony. Even the director of Lijiang Heritage Bureau came to our wedding. I did need to smile, shake hands and drink with them. But I have got used to this kind of work. This is my daily job – I am paid to smile and make people happy. In that sense, this is not too much different from my wedding at home. I also need to smile to many relatives and friends who I am actually not so familiar with. That day, Mr. Liu was very happy. He drank a lot and blessed us.

Chao's willingness to hold his wedding in the courtyard demonstrated his desire to further his career by pleasing Mr. Liu. In contrast, when Mr. Liu invited the moderator, Mei, to hold her wedding ceremony in the courtyard in 2013, Mei refused. As she explained, 'I couldn't bear it if my own wedding was held at the same place I work every day. I would like to have a special wedding, not one designed to serve others. I need something that is only for me and my husband.'

Many young Naxi I met in Lijiang are influenced by social media and visitors from other parts of the country. In contrast to previous decades in China in which parents and matchmakers played major roles in arranging weddings, they are interested in dating, conducting modern wedding ceremonies, and being more independent in their relationships with their native families. Like Mei, many of them are keen to arrange their wedding and their wedding pictures in a Western style.<sup>60</sup>

The difference in Chao's and Mei's reactions to Mr. Liu's invitation cannot simply be explained by their different ethnic status – Chao is Han and Mei is Naxi – but also reflects their gender difference and their individual attitudes towards their careers at the courtyard. Chao believed that the venue of his wedding did not matter, so he accepted Mr. Liu's invitation in order to please him and increase his chances of promotion. Nevertheless, Chao still decided to arrange his wedding in a Western style. 'At least,' Chao told me, 'this makes me feel different.'

60 In these white weddings the bride wears a white lace dress, and the groom dresses in a formal suit.

## Locals' Responses: Hope and Frustration

One day in the summer of 2011, I met Maoniu, a 45-year-old part-time worker in the courtyard.<sup>61</sup> Maoniu (which means Yak in Chinese) is his artist name, because he wants to be as strong as a yak in the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. As he told me, 'I have dark skin and long hair. That's exactly what they [tourists] think a real Naxi men should look like.' Maoniu had been a farmer before he started working in the tourism industry. He worked multiple jobs to earn enough to support his 18-year-old son at college, pay for his wedding, and buy him an apartment in the New Town of Lijiang. Maoniu appreciated the job opportunities that the tourism industry in Lijiang has offered him. Without tourists, he would still be a farmer and could not afford to buy his son a new apartment. As he said, 'I hope that my son will not be a farmer. But nowadays life is not easy and you need money for everything. I have to work harder so I can provide him with a bright future.'

Since 2008, Maoniu has worked as a dancer in the *Impression Lijiang* during the day and as a singer at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard at night. *Impression Lijiang* is performed at an outdoor theatre 3,100 metres above sea level, at the base of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. The famous Chinese film director Zhang Yimou directed this grandiose show as part of his 'Impression Series,' a collection of performances dedicated to several individual historic sites in China with his signature cinematic and storytelling style. Since its launch in 2007, the show has become extremely successful – 600,000 tourists viewed the performance in 2008, which generated 6.7 million *yuan* (Gao and Zhou 2010). When we talked about the difference between these two projects he worked for, he told me that,

The show of *Impression Lijiang* is very popular. I am one of the 500 local performers who are Naxi, Bai, Yi, and Lisu. We launch the show two or three times a day depending on the weather, but it is still almost full every time. Many tourists come to that show because of the fame of Zhang Yimou. It has become one of the 'must-sees' during their visit in Lijiang.

61 Part-time workers have other jobs during the day such as working as dancers in tourism performances, singers in the bars, waiters or waitresses in the restaurants, and cleaners in the guesthouses. They come to the courtyard to help out at wedding ceremonies in the evenings. They are paid considerably less than permanent workers, about 500 to 800 *yuan* per month. They frequently change jobs for better offers. This sort of work has allowed them to comprehend the tourism market and the manifold sociocultural transitions of Lijiang.

Here [at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard] it is different. We need to more interactively communicate. They [tourists] like to watch us, chat with us, and dance with us. This is not only a performance; it is an ethnic wedding ceremony. Our job is to give them a unique experience and make them happy. [...] However, the business of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is not so successful. I think it is really difficult for us Naxi people to compete with those Han Chinese business people. They know how to attract and entertain tourists. Anyway, this is Mr. Liu's problem, not mine.

While I was talking with Maoniu, preparations were taking place for a ceremony later that day. Actors were arriving, Mei and two other girls were practicing dancing and Chao was setting up his video camera. Mr. Liu arrived shortly after, and spoke excitedly to everyone about the preparations. 'Will there be a performance today?' I asked. 'Yes, in the afternoon there will be a group wedding ceremony for three couples; a tour group from Sichuan will also come for dinner. We need to prepare carefully,' Mr. Liu explained, looking serious.

'Life is not as easy as it used to be,' Mr. Liu further explained, adding, 'couples are not always inclined to visit Lijiang and book the wedding service at our place.' To improve his business, Mr. Liu signed a contract with several tourism agencies in Kunming targeting diverse groups of tourists. In addition to actual wedding ceremonies for couples, he designed a dinner and show package (by the mock bride and groom) for the groups of tourists to experience Naxi culture (Chapter 3). Mr. Liu hopes that this new service will improve his business in the long run.

According to Mr. Liu, it is difficult for local businesses to compete with tourism products produced by outsiders such as Zhang Yimou's *Impression Lijiang*. The decline of *Naxi Ancient Music*, for instance, illustrates this phenomenon. Founded in 1988, *Naxi Ancient Music*, which was initially called Lijiang Ancient Music, is organized by the Dayan Ancient Music Association. With an English-language commentary from local scholar Xuan Ke and a number of over-60-year-old musicians with white beards, the performance presents traditional Naxi music to foreign visitors, especially English-speaking tourists from Europe and United States. From 1998 to 2007, people from over 30 countries saw the concert, generating more than 5 million *yuan* (c. 0.7 million USD) in revenue to Lijiang. However, since 2010, the tourism market for Naxi Ancient Music gradually lost its popularity. Han Chinese, the majority of the tourists in Lijiang nowadays, show little interest in such Naxi-based tourism products. The wealth, education, business skills and networks of the Han businesspeople from outside the town make them the dominant force in the tourism market.

After that day, I met Mr. Liu on many other occasions. I found that his frustration is not only with the business, but also with the ways in which the tourism industry has influenced his hometown. I did not realize this until weeks later when we met in a bar called Sakura. On that day, Mr. Liu was accompanying some government officials for a drink after a business meeting. The bar was full of people drinking, talking, laughing, and dancing. Young people were flirting with each other and looking for love affairs (*yanyu*); several Han girls were dressed in Naxi clothes and selling beer to customers; some prostitutes stood outside the bar, trying to talk with tourists who were passing by. Mr. Liu had already been drinking when I met him; when I accompanied him to the bathroom, he suddenly stopped, pointed, and shouted to the people in the bar, 'Lijiang has been corrupted by these people. They are all bad! They destroy Lijiang. The city is ruined.'

It was not the only time I heard about his unhappiness with the recent development of his hometown. Although Mr. Liu is one of the local entrepreneurs who supported the commercialization of Naxi culture, he has often expressed his dissatisfaction with the rapid expansion of tourism. His words at the Sakura bar were in fact not just drunken nonsense, but a frustrated expression of his perspective. Naxi culture, the core of his hometown, has been 'ruined' by the commercialization of the tourism industry.

In the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, Mr. Liu is not the only one to have complained about these changes. Other local actors, such as Maoniu and Mei, also expressed similar feelings during that day after the wedding ceremony:

I: What do you think about the Old Town?

Maoniu: I was born and grew up here. This is my homeland, but. . .

I: But?

Maoniu: But many things are different now. Tourism is good; they give us a lot of opportunities. Yet, when I walk on the street now, I feel like a stranger. I can only hear Han Chinese on the street, no more Naxi being spoken. The town is loud and crowded. I just come and work here.

I: Yeah, many people complain that it's too loud in the evening.

Mei: Absolutely, so I never bring my friends to these bars. We often eat and go to the KTV in Huama Street [a new developed commercial street in the New Town].

Maoniu: That's true. I never eat in the Old Town. Everything has become so expensive.

Over the years 2005 to 2017, I heard a number of complaints from local Naxi residents. The older generations, in particular, which Mr. Liu, Maoniu, and Fuhua belong to, are very concerned about the dramatic change that has happened in Lijiang. They complained about noise, pollution, the increased congestion and the rise in the cost of living. Many expressed the feeling of having lost the traditional lifestyle and community cohesion. They often recall their image of Lijiang's Old Town from memory, which offers them a 'reference point to secure their existence against displacement and establish a connection with the home place where they once played, socialized and grew up' (Su 2012: 38). They hope to claim or protect their own heritage when it is threatened or destroyed through the recent heritage tourism development. Such heritage, in the form of ritual performances and daily life activities, evokes a sense of local pride or nostalgia based on personal experiences and memories.

Young people like Chao and Mei maintain a relaxed and positive attitude towards this transition. This young generation grew up in a very Sinicized social environment. Their education and employment experience makes them less attached to their ethnic and cultural background. They normally speak with each other in fluent Mandarin with a Yunnan accent. Some of them have not even learned the Naxi language at home. Their connection with their Naxi identity is practical – it is rooted in their aim to become professional ethnic performers or tour guides. Some workers, like Chao, are not even Naxi but Han Chinese. Yet they are not so different from the other Naxi staff. Through dancing, singing, toasting, and drinking, they know how to 'perform ethnicity' during the ceremony in the courtyard. In this sense, to be a Naxi or a Han does not matter to them: 'Naxi' becomes a fluid symbol in their profession.

At the same time, young Naxi people are also eager to experience the modern 'outside world.' Jealous of the Naxi singers who perform in Beijing, Mei, for instance, dreams of working in the capital or travelling to romantic destinations such as Paris. Along with the influx of Han Chinese tourists, local Naxi youth consume the romance that the tourism industry generates, creating a desire to experience a modern materialistic world.

One thing all these locals have in common – both the young and the old generation working in the courtyard – is that they all live in the New Town. As Maoniu told me,

Five years ago, I would have not moved because this is my home and most of my friends are here. Old Naxi people like my mother were very reluctant to move out. They knew each neighbourhood. Every day they visited

their friends and chatted with each other. They had their community, and entertainment. But I just bought a new apartment and moved to the New Town. For my mother, this was a pity, but for me, the Old Town is getting very inconvenient. None of my old friends live here [in the Old Town] anymore.

During my stays in Lijiang from 2005 to 2010, I witnessed a type of silent 'voting with their feet', as a number of original residents moved out of the Old Town. They found it too difficult to keep up with the rapid changes of a tourism-dominated environment. In particular, local residents expressed worry and disappointment about the bar street. Some could not sleep because of the noise and the bright lights. They rented their houses to immigrants who were willing to commit to paying a high rent for five or ten years, and sometimes longer. With the income generated from renting their houses, these original residents moved to newly built apartments they purchased in the New Town. These local Naxi thus enjoy a better quality life with easy access to public facilities and transportation. Their new lifestyle is not so different from one enjoyed by immigrants in the Old Town, from the food they eat, the clothes they wear, to the amount of leisure time they enjoy.

## Conclusion

Inspired by Angelika Bammer's (1994) notion of 'symbolic displacement,' Beth Notar (2006) illustrated that the town of Dali followed Lijiang's model of development for tourism and undertook, in 2000, a similar reconstruction to promote tourism. As a result, the recent cultural representation of Dali has been separated from the people of the place. As Notar argued, the construction of antique-like architecture, the creation of theme parks, and the ethnic touristic performance are all part of the process of 'symbolic displacement' (2006: 135). This process of 'local development' has occurred in other historic sites in China such as Xi'an (Zhu 2018) and Shanghai (Arkaraprasertkul 2013), and has resulted in the demolishing of local housing and the dislocation of local residents who are replaced by immigrants from other parts of the country.

Similar cases can be found on the other side of the globe. Examining the heritage making in historic towns in Greece, Italy, and Thailand, Michael Herzfeld (2006) has noticed that local populations may often be displaced in the name of heritage which results in spatial transformation, increased commercialization, and new economic and planning mechanisms. The

flow on effects cause patterns of 'spatial cleansing' in which 'theme parks, partially made up of ancient material but heavily restored and refurbished to suit modern ideas about the past, come to replace densely populated areas and in turn create growing zones of disaffected and displaced people' (Herzfeld 2006: 132).

In Lijiang, cultural heritage and tourism industry promotion has become a similar government strategy to legitimize social stratification and gentrification. However, I suggest that there is still a space where individuals counterbalance the dominant narrative set by the state, enabling the co-existence of heritages by reacting and living in-between the real and imagined worlds of heritage.

The daily life in the courtyard has shown various actors' responses to the erosion of tradition and the impacts of emerging modernity. On the one hand, all of them contribute to the customization of their local heritage to the modern tastes of the tourists. On the other hand, these people, despite working under the same ethnic label, have various responses to the state-oriented narrative of cultural heritage. Mr. Liu mediates ethnic tradition and the modern spirit of heritage production. Dongba Fuhua promotes his Dongba identity to obtain social recognition. Prof. Ming seeks to preserve authenticity while confronting the floods of entrepreneurs from outside. Tourism workers, like Mei and Chao, perform Naxiness on stage to make a better living.

Such responses have plural effects: they can reinforce existing power hierarchies, mediate an individual's desire between profit and pride, and motivate people to pursue a better life. As Evans and Rowlands (2014) show through their ethnographic study in Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces in China, there are many examples of local movements and communal responses to heritage that are rooted in an emotional and ethnic commitment. 'Every community or group has its own ideas about themselves that they wish to convince others, and about the others with whom they necessarily interact' (Salazar and Graburn 2014: 15). By tracing and mapping their individual paths, desires, strategies, and visions for the future, a more nuanced understanding of the effects of heritage on the local people can be pieced together.

## 5 Guests

Romance is a wish fulfilment or utopian fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden.  
– Jameson (1981: 110)

In the summer of 2011, I spent an afternoon drinking tea with Hong and Xiao, the owners of the Cross from the South hostel. The couple named their hostel in remembrance of their time studying in New Zealand in their early twenties. In 2010, one year after graduating and returning to Beijing, they quit their jobs, moved to Lijiang, and got married at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. ‘It was amazing,’ Xiao told me about their wedding and the decision to move to Lijiang,

We wished for a 100% pure, exotic, and romantic wedding in New Zealand under the blue sky and snowy mountains. Lijiang makes our dream come true. Without pollution and heavy traffic like in Beijing, this is really a special and sacred place. The wedding was special for us. No family member came to our wedding as we had another two ceremonies in our hometown separately. But in Lijiang, a lot of new friends came. Our Naxi wedding, our new life, and our future – What an adventure!

In the previous chapters, I illustrated how Naxi heritage has been customized for the tourism industry. The integration of various Naxi traditions has facilitated the creation of a tourist destination, a place well suited to urban Chinese people in search of romance. While the first two chapters highlighted the transformation of Lijiang’s built environment and wedding rituals, the third chapter described the local actors’ roles in heritage making and tourism performance.

In the next two chapters, I will explore guests’ experiences at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard and their life in Lijiang more generally. Like Hong and Xiao, China’s modern consumer society allows the urban middle-class to move around the country in search of alternative lifestyles and employment. As part of their search for romance, many guests engage in romantic consumption through celebrating their actual wedding in the courtyard. They are couples who wish to experience ethnic weddings on their honeymoon trip, lifestyle migrants who would like to settle in Lijiang,



local Naxi interested in their own culture, and tourists who come solely for entertainment.

I call them ‘guests,’ because although some of them stay in Lijiang for many years, they all to a certain extent remain ‘guests’ in that context, not quite part of the original Naxi residential community. Indeed, the local actors of the courtyard regard many of the incoming travellers as guests. As the heritage manager, Mr. Liu, once told me, ‘We would like to call them guests. We do not want to treat them as customers although this is a paid service. We hope our guests from different parts of the world can enjoy the wedding ceremonies that we provide.’

### **The Honeymooners, Vincent and Lulu**

Many guests in the courtyard are honeymooners. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of young Chinese couples go on a honeymoon following their weddings at home, a practice that did not exist in traditional China. As in modern Western societies, Chinese people today use such a once-in-a-lifetime experience to celebrate their new marriage and to pursue individual happiness. A number of couples also take this opportunity to have their own wedding photos taken. Lijiang’s setting – its ethnic context and natural landscape – has made it one of the most popular honeymoon destinations in China.

‘Lijiang has always been my dream place for a wedding,’ Lulu told me excitedly when we first met at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. This was on 5 December 2010, the day when Vincent and Lulu had their wedding ceremony as part of their honeymoon in China. Vincent is of Vietnamese origin and Lulu is from Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province in Southern China. As with most tourists who enjoy the services of the courtyard, they already had their official marriage ceremony in Guangzhou. But before starting their new life in Vietnam, they decided to experience another special wedding in Lijiang. While planning their honeymoon, they found the service of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard through websites and booked in advance. Lulu explained why:

I grew up in a traditional family in which I have to adhere to the path my parents have designed for me. They asked me to learn to play the piano when I was five years old. They expected me to study hard and go to a good university. They hoped that I would be able to find a good job in an international company after graduation. They also expected me to

find a good man to marry. There are so many expectations. I followed them and tried to be a good girl because I wanted them to be happy. [...] Now it is about my marriage. When Vincent and I had our wedding in Guangzhou, we felt so stressed. I think that the ceremony was more for my parents. We had to book a luxury hotel half a year in advance to host over 30 tables full of guests. We had to dress very formally, and to smile to numerous relatives whom we might not even have met before and would probably will never meet again in the future. It was really the most exhausting week I have ever had. I told myself that this was my last duty to my parents. After that, I will be on my own. I should enjoy my life and start my own family. Of course, I will still respect them, but in a different way.

I am lucky that Vincent understands me. He had the idea of arranging a special tourist wedding. So, we came here and booked the service. I love Lijiang because it is the most romantic place in China. This is exactly what we need: no more family burden, and nothing to be worried about. I feel relaxed here.

Young adults such as Lulu belong to a generation of only children.<sup>62</sup> For this reason, their parents have high expectations, including the choice of their partners, their career development, and the style of their wedding. Many young Chinese end up feeling frustrated because of the continuous interference of their parents in the planning and preparation of their marriage. In the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, young couples are keen to have their own marriage and to celebrate it in a personal and memorable way. Many couples arrange a wedding ceremony that satisfies their romantic sensibilities of the place as an ideal and temporary escape from their family responsibilities. It reduces the stress one would experience in weddings at home.

Lulu showed a great interest in the wedding ceremony because she felt that the chanting of the Dongba can 'cleanse' her. After the Dongba completed the *suzu* ritual, she asked the moderator many questions about the meaning of the ritual, the Dongba religion, and its relation with Tibetan Buddhism. In the lantern ritual, the last stage of the wedding performance, Lulu was asked to place a lantern in the canal, a way to receive blessings of everlasting happiness and a new life. When performing this ritual, some grass in the canal blocked her lantern from moving. Without hesitation, Vincent jumped

62 China's one-child family policy was announced in 1979 and developed as a response to the country's rapid population growth. For a detail discussion on the social impacts of the policy, see Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005).

into the water and freed the lantern allowing it to smoothly float away. As he told me later: 'This is important – it is for our future.' Vincent did not really know that the lantern ritual stemmed from the Han tradition of worshipping ancestors. He fully believed that the lantern could bless their family as the moderator had told him.

Although the general public or the Dongba experts might regard the content of the Naxi wedding as inauthentic or just for fun, many of the couples are enthusiastic about this special form of wedding ceremony. They feel much more authentic and more able to freely express themselves than in their everyday life, because Lijiang and the courtyard offers them an opportunity to engage in non-everyday activities, a freedom which they lack at home (Wang 1999).

### **New Lijiang Residents, Wang and Yan**

Many young Chinese tourists from big cities stay in Lijiang for long periods of time. They often open guesthouses, bars, or restaurants, and prefer to call themselves new Lijiang residents rather than tourists, who they increasingly distance themselves from. Some of the new resident couples even choose to get married in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. For them the decision goes beyond romance and freedom, and is primarily a ritual affirmation of their new identities as Lijiang residents. The exotic wedding ceremony separates the couple from their previous social networks and strengthens their relationship with other new residents with similar longing for romantic consumption.

Wang and Yan from the Blossom Hill Inn (*Huajiantang*) were one of these couples. Wang was from Zhejiang Province: he had worked in Shanghai as a hotel manager for about ten years after finishing his military service. In 2008, he and his sister quit their jobs, travelled around Yunnan, and then decided to stay in Lijiang. They opened a high-end luxury hotel named Blossom Hill Inn with the support from their friends. Wang explained why he chose to live in Lijiang:

I used to be a hotel manager in Shanghai. My work required me to stay at the hotel for quite a long time. Working overtime was normal for me; every day I felt very tired and so I started searching for a way out from that situation. This made me think: Why not leave Shanghai and have a long vacation? My sister had the same feeling and she joined me very soon. We left the city, brought our luggage and our dog, and drove all the way to Yunnan. We travelled

around Yunnan, saw many beautiful scenes, and had great experiences on the road. When we arrived at Lijiang, we suddenly fell in love with this Old Town because of its natural landscape and exotic atmosphere. I have to say, this is a magical place that can heal our souls. We felt peaceful and joyful here, so we decided to stay longer. Here we established the Blossom Hill Inn. We hope this place can become a spiritual home [*xinlin jiyuan*] for all visitors of Lijiang, a place to give people inner peace.

Like Wang and his sister, many guests complained about various aspects of their past: jobs, lifestyle, or relations with colleagues and family. They seek new ways of managing their life. Once they settle down in Lijiang, they use entrepreneurial talent to run their own business. An important goal of their journey is to obtain a better work–life balance, for instance, by being self-employed.

Yan used to live and work in Chongqing. In 2009, she visited Lijiang as a tourist and stayed in the Blossom Hill Inn. Wang volunteered to be her tour guide and they quickly fell in love during the journey. After Wang returned to Chongqing, they discussed their future. Half a year later, Yan decided to quit her job, moved to Lijiang, and began working at the Blossom Hill Inn as a manager. As she told me,

All my friends and relatives were surprised when they heard that I would leave Chongqing and move to Lijiang. I had been a consultant in an international training company for several years. This was really a decent job. I could earn more than 10,000 *yuan* per month at that time. My colleagues and supervisor were very nice to me and we were like a big family. They did not understand why I would quit such a job. Sometimes even I myself doubted my decision. Maybe it is because of the power of love? [laugh] It is not only because of Wang, but also because of this place. I think there is some kind of magic that makes me feel calm. [...] However, I got support from the younger generation of my family. They thought I was the pioneer that broke the rules, and I did something they also wanted to do but could not.

In November 2011, Wang and Yan chose to have their wedding in Lijiang. Since the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is located opposite the Blossom Hill Inn, the couple knew how the ceremonies were run and what to expect, so they decided to have a Naxi style wedding there. The couple planned how their ceremony would be structured and used the opportunity to strengthen and display their identity as new Lijiang residents.

While planning their wedding, Wang and Yan were able to revise the content of the wedding ceremony to meet their own tastes. For instance, instead of starting with a welcome ceremony at the entrance of the town and then a horse ride into the courtyard, they decided to stand at the entrance of the courtyard to welcome all the invited guests. They also thought the part of the ritual where the performer pretends to cry was too sad, so instead the bridesmaid sang a popular love song entitled ‘The Moon Represents My Heart (*Yueliang daibiao wodexin*).’ The couple hired singers from the local bars to perform as light entertainment. On the day, Wang was very happy with how the wedding arrangements came together:

I was grateful that officials from the Lijiang Heritage Bureau accepted my invitation and attended the wedding. I felt respected [*youmianzi*]. The ceremony was a lot of fun. Many guests joined the performance, singing and dancing together. We played a lot of games, but the speeches of the guests were more important. After the Dongba ritual, I invited guests to give a speech one by one: my sister, my parents, my old friends from Shanghai, our new friends in Lijiang, and the deputy director of the Heritage Bureau. This was an unforgettable and important experience for us.

Wang and Yan thought the *suzu* ritual was the most sacred part of the ceremony, even if they had not clearly understood its meaning. At the end of the ritual, they all cried. In a conversation with them after their wedding, the couple expressed their emotions during this part of the ceremony:

Yan: It was really impressive. I had seen the performance before, but when we were really embedded in the ritual, I could feel the sacredness of the chanting and the magical power entering my body. I believe the Dongba ritual will bless us and bind our souls together.

I: I saw you cry?

Yan: It is hard to say. I had a lot of emotions at that time, a mix of happiness, sadness, and hopes for my new life. It is like a transitional stage of our life, you know? Moving to Lijiang was not an easy decision, as my parents did not agree with it. However, after they attended our wedding, they gave us their blessings and showed their support. They sang and danced with us at the ceremony. I felt warm and liberated. This is really meaningful. The wedding is the start of our new life in Lijiang.

Wang and Yan came to Lijiang looking for a new home, one separated from the traditional bondages of family and kinship and more focused on the

spiritual binding of a small circle of friends sharing the same longing (Su 2012). They chose to marry in the courtyard not just for fun: with their friends as witnesses, the wedding demonstrated their determination to pursue freedom and self-realization. One month after the wedding, the couple went back to Yan's hometown to have another wedding ceremony. It was a ceremony especially devised for the bride's family, but it did not have the same level of significance for them as the one in the courtyard.

### **He Gang from Naxi Mama**

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard ceremonies attracted a lot of Han Chinese customers, but only a few native Naxi residents in the Old Town are interested in the services they provided. While the older generation of Naxi in Lijiang might have some memories of traditional Naxi weddings, they are not interested in traditional ritual ceremonies from their past. This is largely because these older Naxi grew up in villages around Lijiang and were educated in modern schools where such traditions held no place. Many locals, especially people living in the New Town of Lijiang or in the surrounding villages, had not heard about the new wedding services. Others who had heard about the services dismissed them as tourist attractions that had little relation to Naxi traditions and culture. As Laohe, a retired Naxi public servant, told me: 'I was once invited to a banquet at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. In my opinion, there are no real Dongba in Lijiang anymore; these performances are only for tourists.' While researching the Naxi Wedding Courtyard from 2008 to 2013, I only saw a few Naxi couples getting married in the courtyard. He Gang, the new owner of the guesthouse Naxi Mama, was one of them.

Naxi Mama is one of the earliest guesthouses established in Lijiang (see Chapter 2). Although Naxi Mama today is not as prosperous as it had been in the early days, when tourism development for Western backpackers in the Old Town had just begun, it is still very popular with foreign tourists and backpackers. Having inherited the business from his mother, He Gang is interested in making friends with people from everywhere in the world. Each day and every night, the tourists hang out at the bar and restaurant area of the guesthouse, drinking beer and chatting with old or new friends. The business allows him to keep an open mind and learn new things from outside. Western backpackers are often curious about local Naxi traditions. He Gang has had to learn more about his own culture so he can respond to questions from outsiders, something that has become part of his everyday job.

In 2009, while organising his own wedding, He Gang noticed the service provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. As he told me,

I initially wanted to book the venue at our community centre in the Old Town. We normally hold our family events there. But then I thought of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, an interesting place just ten minutes walk from my guesthouse. Several times I saw brides and grooms passing by my guesthouse with horses, white cranes, and music. Their wedding services attract many of my guests; they have dinner there and join in the wedding ceremony. I went there twice and found out the courtyard provides photographers and filmmakers. My wife and I believed that having our wedding there would be a fantastic experience, but, of course, we would not have the food they usually served. That's totally designed for tourists, so we planned to have our own cooks.

Another reason why He Gang chose to hold his wedding at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard was the cost. After negotiating with the manager of the courtyard, Mr. Liu, He Gang booked a full-package service for 2,000 *yuan* not including food. This is remarkably cheap for a wedding in Lijiang – a very simple wedding can cost as much as 10,000 *yuan*. He Gang arranged the banquet himself and hired eight chefs to prepare the food.

On the day of their wedding, He Gang and his wife dressed up in traditional Naxi-style clothes to welcome all the guests at the main entrance of the town. He Gang dressed in a white vest of yak leather, and his wife dressed in a light blue coat with laces on the collar and sleeves. The wedding party entered the courtyard accompanied by the Dongba and the band. The couple told all their friends and family members to dress in similar traditional-looking Naxi clothes to attend the ceremony, a practice that is atypical in Naxi weddings.<sup>63</sup>

He Gang invited about 200 guests from his village. The main banquet took place at noon, while the dinner was reserved only to close relatives and friends. Since the courtyard could only host 20 tables at a time, the invited guests followed the principle of 'first come, first served' and many of his friends stood or sat beside the tables, precisely the usual way the Naxi

63 In recent years, the government has issued a policy that requires all staff members working in the tourism industry in Lijiang to wear Naxi clothes. This has boosted a huge market demand for Naxi-style traditional-looking clothes. Many local and provincial factories continue to produce various types of ethnic clothing. The designs include a mixture of dresses from different ethnic groups such as Naxi, Tibetans, Bai, or Pumi. Conversely, the fabric of He's bride's wedding gown was more colourful than Naxi wedding dresses in the early days.

people arrange their wedding banquets at home (see Chapter 3). He Gang also asked his family members to prepare and deliver dishes at tables. The eight chefs were assigned to cook traditional Naxi wedding dishes, rather than the food the courtyard usually serves to tourists.

The banquet lasted until the late afternoon. After the Dongba ritual, the singing and dancing began. A family from Paris staying at He Gang's guesthouse were also invited to the ceremony. Watching the owner of their guesthouse getting married, these tourists felt they were part of a very authentic Naxi wedding. Young Naxi guests, especially the children, from He Gang's village were happy with how the wedding was conducted; they joined in the performance and sang Naxi songs. However, most of the senior guests were not happy with the wedding. He Gang's grandmother complained,

This was a mess [*luanqibazao*]. It was quite different from how we Naxi get married. The dress of the bride looked weird. They also made a lot of mistakes in the ritual. The crying ritual was in a wrong rhythm. This part is supposed to happen at the bride's family, but now it is at the same place. The burning of the pine twigs was mistakenly used to expel the evil. [...] Anyway, it is their [her grandson's] wedding.

Most Naxi people in Lijiang follow a wedding tradition that has been influenced by the Han practice (Chapter 3). Especially to elder Naxi, the services provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard misrepresent the customs of the Naxi wedding, and thus lack authenticity. They regard it as a tourism commodity that does not actually belong to them. The story of He Gang's wedding is exceptional; because of his close affiliation with tourists, he was willing to try something outside of his traditional frame of reference. In 2011, when I went back to Lijiang, I met He Gang's wife and his one-year-old son at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard; the little boy danced and chased other guests around following the rhythm of the music.

### **Foreign Tourists, Marina and Johnson**

Since 2011, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard has changed its strategy, offering shows and dinners rather than real weddings. In these shows, they invite a woman and a man among the guests to dress as bride and groom, and to perform all the wedding rituals. During the performance, the guests participate in games and dances while taking photographs. This change in



the wedding ritual transforms the previous theatrical performance into a participatory game. The guests, especially those who came to the courtyard primarily to enjoy the food and drink, welcomed the change. They regard the Dongba ritual as part of the entertainment, similar to performances they have seen in many other minority areas in China.

This kind of participatory game is very common in Chinese tourism destinations. For instance, in a few remote Miao villages in Guizhou Province, tour guides invite tourists to wear Miao costumes and join in some local events such as weddings and religious ceremonies to experience the ethnic culture, although these events are performances set up for tourists only. Similarly, Philip Xie (2011) has recorded that Han tourists participate in 'staged' ethnic weddings arranged by the ethnic Li minority in Hainan, an island located in the South China Sea. Some scholars have indicated that tourists indeed are indifferent as to whether the objects are real or false, similar to their experience during a visit to Disneyland (Marin 1984; Walsh 1992). A number of tourists, especially the elderly and the younger generation, appeared to be happy with the game. As a researcher on cultural heritage and ethnic tourism, I have observed and experienced such participatory games at different places in China.<sup>64</sup> During these events, I have always wondered whether authenticity in fact is of importance to these tourists.

One summer day in 2011, Marina and Johnson, from the United States, watched such a participatory wedding performance in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. At the time, they were over 60 years old. They initially planned to just enjoy the dinner and watch the wedding performance as other tourists. However, since they were the only foreign couple attending the performance that day, the moderator, Mei, invited them to perform as the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony. At the beginning, both were very nervous. Johnson wore the groom's clothes under the guidance of the moderator. He touched the yak leather on the white vest with his hands and said: 'It is so

64 For instance, in 2007, I attended a conference organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in Sichuan Province. The participants of the conference were scholars of tourism studies and practitioners from tourism destinations in China. After the conference, the organizer led us to visit a Tibetan attraction for a short field trip. The Tibetan tour guide encouraged us to wear traditional Tibetan clothes and take photos as souvenirs. In the beginning, we felt funny and even ridiculous, as we all knew it was a game for tourists and outsiders. However, once we wore the costumes, we looked at each other, laughing and playing together. Under these circumstances, we communicated with each other in a more intimate way. This was not because we had a certain real or false experience, but because wearing an exotic costume made us establish an interpersonal relationship at that moment.

weird. [...] Why do I need to get married again after 30 years? In addition, there are no friends and family members here to witness this “wedding”!

After getting dressed, the crying ritual started in the middle of the courtyard. Two Naxi women poured water on Marina’s head and brushed her hair. In the meantime, an older Naxi woman stood behind Marina, singing the song ‘Marrying her Daughter’ in a sad tune. At the beginning, Marina looked curious about what was happening; however, when she heard the song, she became calm; tears started dwelling in her eyes. Johnson also became calm. Suddenly, the whole courtyard was shrouded in a heartfelt atmosphere of sadness. When the crying ritual finished, the Dongba led the couple to the chapel where the rest of the ceremony was carried out. They were asked to kneel down in front of the sacred altar. The Dongba started to conduct the *suzu* ritual, burning incense, chanting, and blessing. He used a red string to bind Johnson and Marina’s hands, and put butter oil on their foreheads. During the ritual, they closed their eyes and listened to the sacred chanting.

Marina told me later that the ritual touched her and brought back some of her deepest memories. She later described:

The song was beautiful, amazingly beautiful! It absolutely touched me. I remembered that my mother did not show up at my wedding. None of my female family members took care of me at that time. [...] The Dongba ritual had a kind of magical power. We both were totally taken in the sacred moment of the ceremony.

After the wedding ritual, Fuhua came to our table and said he was very excited to meet the couple. He told Marina that he felt this was a very effective ritual: ‘Many tourists come to the courtyard only for fun. But I can feel that you love each other, and both of you were deeply embedded in the ritual. I believe the god Su will protect your family.’

I had never seen Fuhua directly expressing his opinion about the ritual to his guests. He was apparently moved by Marina and Johnson’s participation. After the wedding service, he invited us to his bedroom on the second floor of the courtyard. The room setting was very simple – a single bed, a desk with a number of books, scriptures, and some personal belongings. Marina and Jonson felt flattered to see the backstage of the show, especially the personal space of the Dongba. Here the backstage became part of the front stage as Fuhua performed his identity as a Dongba in another way. He proudly showed us the scriptures he used in the ritual performance and excerpts from a project he was working on. He told us that ‘the Dongba

Culture Research Institute wants to translate some Dongba classic books into Chinese, but they lack expertise, so they invited me to do it. They do not offer a lot of money, but I still feel I should work on it.'

Fuhua kept talking about his low salary, the difficulty of conservation work, and how precious Dongba culture is. In the end, he offered Marina a manuscript scroll he drew for the Nature Conservancy, an international NGO dedicated to the conservation of natural resources. Marina happily accepted the gift and, in return, the couple gave Fuhua 200 *yuan* as a tip. Chinese tourists do not usually give tips. Fuhua seemed very happy and deeply encouraged. After the couple left, he told me: 'I think that they are really in love with our culture and I can feel it.'

Marina and Jonson's experience illustrates that the performance may also lead to a very personal and emotional response. During the performance, whether the scripture or the dance is authentic or not is no longer of great importance. When the water was poured on Marina's hair and the melody of 'Marrying her Daughter' was in the air, the touristic performance might offer them temporary spiritual and aesthetic nourishment. Such experience echoes sociologist Wang Ning's (1999) analysis of existential authenticity in tourism. As Wang (1999) suggests, authenticity sometimes has nothing to do with the toured objects. Some tourists might get strongly involved by linking the experience with personal feelings (Kim and Jamal 2007).

However, most foreign tourists in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard were more comfortable to act as members of the audience rather than as actual participants in the wedding rituals. Even though they clearly understood that the Dongba wedding ritual is only a form of game, most of them (like Johnson) still felt very awkward about participating. Instead, they preferred to watch the ritual and join the dancing at the end of the ceremony. As the wedding ceremony is targeted at Han Chinese tourists, the service includes elements of both Naxi and Han wedding customs. This combination is a clear strategy of customizing Naxi heritage to the tastes of Han tourists, integrating the familiar with the strange or exotic. Yet, as the wedding ceremony is completely alien to Western tourists, they experience the ritual in a different, often awkward, way.

## Conclusion

Serving as a microcosm of romantic consumption in Lijiang, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard offers its guests an alternative experience to their urban lives, an alternative experience that is both sensual and emotional. The stories of these guests not only shed light on the motivations of Chinese urbanites

who visit Lijiang but also on how the experiences of these people shape the heritage tourism industry in this place. Although Mr. Liu's company claims the wedding service is authentic and exotic, guests in the courtyard are not necessarily searching for this type of authentic experience. The social construction of the heritage space offers guests alternative experiences of romance, pleasure, and freedom. The different ways in which people seek to escape from their social environment is reflected in the unique ways these people experienced the ceremony.

Marriage ceremonies all over the world, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, have often been transformed into tourism weddings, incorporating cultural imagery beyond the culture of the marrying couple: non-Christian Japanese tourists celebrate their wedding ceremonies in American cathedrals and churches (Samuel 2007), young American couples visit the United Kingdom for a *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*-themed wedding; Chinese celebrities arrange their marriage in Fiji or Bhutan. All of these examples reflect varieties of themed wedding practices targeting romantic consumption. Within the magic space of the 'Other,' tourists participate in momentary forms of transgression, which enable them to act out their desires while pursuing an unrestrained hedonic experience (Redmon 2003).

In some of these examples, the commercialization of cultural tradition not only creates a customized heritage for tourists, but can also lead to a cultural revitalization in the local communities. This is particularly the case in a Miao village in Fenghuang County, Hunan Province, where young villagers are keen to learn their wedding customs due to the intangible heritage movement and the ethnic tourism industry (Yu and Zhu 2015).

However, since the services provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard are very different from both current and traditional Naxi wedding customs, only a few Naxi perceive the ceremony as a valuable experience. Designed as a customized heritage product for Han Chinese tourists, the services of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard fail to function as an educational experience or opportunity for cultural transmission, contrary to the claims of the Heritage Bureau and the manager, Mr. Liu. For this reason, the customization of the wedding as a heritage product alienates local residents further from this kind of tourism service.

The stories of guests at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard illustrate the various forms of desire and pleasure – romantic, material, and emotional – which are being performed and consumed in Chinese society. Instead of being mere spectators, these guests all actively engage in the celebration and negotiation of heritage through their romantic consumption. They do so by sharing their experiences in mass media, on the Internet, and in other public social interactions.



## 6 After the Show

In modern, self-illusory hedonism, the individual is much more an artist of the imagination, someone who takes images from memory or the existing environment, and rearranges or otherwise improves them in his mind in such a way that they become distinctly pleasing.  
– Campbell (1987: 78)

This chapter will explore the different ways guests interact with Lijiang after experiencing the wedding performance in the courtyard. Some people continue to wander around the Old Town in search of comfort and spiritual healing, while others establish a home in hopes of a new future. They often develop their own businesses and local social networks. For them, Lijiang is a place of rootedness that reflects their desire to search for ‘a spiritual ending that fulfils the course of life’ (Su 2014: 4). In establishing a new home, they also develop necessary coping strategies to engage with the new living environment, thereby distancing themselves from the ‘lure of the exotic’ that attracted them in the first place.

Providing a glimpse into the microcosm of Lijiang, the stories of these guests reflect the hedonistic nature of romantic consumption as an assemblage of imaginaries, tensions, and desires that co-exist, interact, and are negotiated consistently. After temporarily finding what they have been searching for, the tensions between these new migrants, the local community, and the government ultimately result in the guests’ loss of their original passion in continuing their pursuit of romantic heritage. Since these guests do not deeply connect with the customized heritage surrounding them, they gradually become dissatisfied and disillusioned with the romanticized world they live in and move on. In this process, the romantic heritage in Lijiang has played various roles: it has acted as a mark of attraction to motivate consumption, a trigger for nostalgia, a motif for protesting for individuals’ rights, and a potential reason to depart on other journeys.

### **Wandering between Dream and Reality**

A number of Han Chinese from the more economically developed eastern parts of the country visit Lijiang on holiday. While many single male tourists spend their nights in bars (Chapter 2), female tourists from cities such as

Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong are interested in the wedding show offered at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. They are often attracted by the performance in this courtyard and dine there as part of the audience. Fei, an audience member I met one night, is one of them. After her graduation in Beijing, Fei had worked in Shenzhen as a banker for ten years. When explaining to me the reason that prompted her to visit Lijiang and the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, she said,

The highly stressful city life forced me to move ahead. I was unable to stop and enjoy my life during the past years. I had to work day and night. I was able to buy an apartment in Shenzhen, but then did not feel happy about it. I just felt tired and wanted to have a break, a long vacation that could make me forget my work. I like Lijiang very much. The air is clean and the sky is blue. Life here is relaxed. You can feel something spiritual here, a healing magic. Like the chanting of the Dongba in the courtyard, I feel as if I am being cleansed.

In contrast to Lijiang, both cities Fei used to live in, Beijing and Shenzhen, have experienced dramatic changes in recent decades due to urbanization. Unfolding socio-spatial transformations have resulted in exclusion, alienation, and segregation, leading to a number of social problems including increased social anxiety in urban populations. As city-dwellers, people often question the safety of their food, environmental health, and the rapid pace of their life. They often seek to find alternative lifestyles in the countryside. As Su (2012) observed, these people visit Lijiang to search for a spiritual home and to escape from the restlessness of modern urban life. It is hard to say whether their search is purely driven by an intrinsic eagerness to consume the 'exotic' or 'romantic,' or whether the desire of finding a 'home' in such an environment is induced by the tourism industry's marketing strategies – or perhaps both. No matter how their desire comes about, once they arrive in Lijiang, many people like Fei share a similar experience of healing.

Fei would reject the label 'tourist' (*youke*); instead, she would prefer to call herself a traveller (*luxingzhe*). According to Fei, travellers consider themselves engaged in more meaningful journeys, in opposition to tourists who simply consume transitory experiences in larger groups, transporting much of the fast-paced, overcrowded urban modes of living into the countryside. Travellers avoid popular tourist districts and seek a natural and peaceful place to live for several months. The typical traveller's day is unrushed and largely free of the urgencies of short-term tourism and urban life. They walk around, meet friends, surf on the Internet, or just stay in the courtyard of

their guesthouses and enjoy the sunshine. They often write diaries and share photos with their online friends. More affluent travellers take long holidays with little financial burden while others are college students who have to work part-time in guesthouses to support their stay.

Fei spent a lot of time writing blogs on the Internet during her stay in Lijiang. She recorded different moments of her life and presented them online. From photographing a wild flower to watching the show in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, Fei enjoyed documenting her life and reading comments from her readers:

I feel this is part of my life in Lijiang. I am enjoying a kind of life that most people do not have. Every day I can explore some part of me, and this makes my days even more exciting. [...] I already have 200 fans on my blog. They are jealous of my journey to Lijiang.

The blog was a platform where she could portray her alternative lifestyle to people in the cities. She used words and photos to present a life that is different from the one experienced by most young urban Chinese. Communicating her experience to her fellows made Fei feel important. Here is one quotation from her blog:

When I woke up it was already late, around 11 o'clock, and the sun shone on my bed. It was so good to wake up in a natural way without an alarm clock. No more morning meetings and deadlines. When I arrived at the main entrance of the town, the music of 'Tick Tock' played all around the central square. Although I hear this song a thousand times a day, I still enjoy the music. I remember the singer, Kankan. Her music represents freedom, love, escape, and sadness. I feel that she is telling me her understanding of life. It simply matches my mood every day. The wooden guitar, the simple melody, and the sad voice easily touch my heart.

It is not so far from the town's gate to Sifang Square, but it is so crowded with tourists. I do not like them, and I do not belong to them. When I arrived at the Sifang Square, the Naxi ethnic dance had already started. Naxi grandpas and grandmas dressing ethnically danced hand-in-hand along with the melody of the Naxi music. I know they come here every day and dance. Are they paid performers? I do not know and do not need to know. Looking at the dance and listening to the music, I just need to enjoy my simple happiness at that moment. Many tourists walked by and took photographs. They are just tourists.



Based on his ethnography in the Indian Ocean, David Picard (2011) argues that tourism offers a magical effect that transforms destinations into magical pleasure gardens in which nature and culture are cultivated for consumption. In Lijiang, it is the magic of exoticness centred on the impetus of the people, like Fei, arriving in and departing from Lijiang every day. However, most of them show no interest in the history of Lijiang; they do not engage with the local Naxi community or specificities that move beyond their construction of the place as an idyllic escape. Indeed, Naxi heritage only served as a temporary decoration of this romantic imagination. What Fei engaged with was her own sense of place, or what Walter Benjamin (2008) calls the aura of the place. This aura is a 'strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 2008: 23). The blog continues:

Hefang [one of her girlfriends, a native Naxi] met me in the square. We went to have lunch together in a local Naxi restaurant, as she knows the owners of the place. Quickly, typical Naxi food was prepared and placed on the table. It included *jidoufen* [deep-fried pea skins], cooked rice and butter tea. I felt hungry and started eating. Hefang happily looked at me when I was eating. She asked, 'What is your favourite city? Lijiang, Beijing or Shenzhen?' I continued drinking my butter tea and told her: 'I like Lijiang, but not the way others like it. I like the decorated old houses with low roofs. I can see them from very far away. I like to bring my camera and go around the town in the early morning without being disturbed by the masses of tourists. It is just that simple. I do not like Beijing, since they have built so many high buildings and large mansions. Shenzhen is the city where I come from; one day I may return to it. Like the cycle of life, I will return to the place where I come from.'

After lunch, we sat on the bridge, relaxing and chatting. Hefang told me she has never really enjoyed relaxing on the bridge during her 20 years in Lijiang. Hefang said: 'You only see the snow mountain and the pretty blue sky, but you never know other parts of Lijiang. More Han business people have come, so it has become more difficult for us to live and work here. The living costs are so high, and many of my friends cannot afford to live here any longer. It's your paradise, not mine.'

It was the first time that I heard about the downsides of Lijiang. Nevertheless, this does not really bother me. This is a fair world. I still can enjoy my own life here.

Fei's surprise about the downsides of Lijiang's socio-economic development reflects her attitude towards the relation between reality and her

imagined world. As noted by Hefang, Fei has never been interested in the real life of Lijiang. She lived in her own imagined world: a world filled with comfort and individual freedom; a romantic utopia. As shown in the blog, travellers such as Fei are consciously aware that they are in fact 'guests' in this foreign place. Despite the many experiences this 'magical place' has offered them, Lijiang can never become their permanent home. Their daily life is filled with wandering, daydreaming, consuming alcohol, having random thoughts, and engaging in casual relationships. They live in their imaginations and share this world through their blogs and other social media.

### **Embracing a New Home**

When guests start to seek their fortune in this new and unknown place, they hold certain expectations of discovering the 'exotic.' They quit their original jobs and established a new home in search of an alternative lifestyle as well as an escape from social and work pressure. Such phenomena, characterized as 'lifestyle migration,' have also been recorded in other parts of the world, including Europe (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Gustafson 2002) and Asia (Yamashita 2012). Most of the lifestyle migrants in Lijiang have substantial knowledge and capital to start a business – one that differs from the conventional careers in the cities. For them, Lijiang is no longer only a place to escape from the reality and feel nostalgic about – it also becomes a platform to start a new career. Their life is entangled in comfort and in the process of capital accumulation (Su 2013). They establish contacts and networks with the local government when seeking new employment opportunities. Many of them start small businesses in the Old Town, such as restaurants, guesthouses or hostels. Others obtain management positions in the local tourism industry, allowing them to make a living while meeting new friends. By moving to rural regions part-time or full-time, they exercise their economic and cultural capital to manifest their prestigious status in the new locality (Kordel and Pohle, 2018). Here I introduce two stories, that of Mr. Sang and that of Wang and Yan, who got married in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard.

Mr. Sang used to be a lecturer at a well-known university in Shanghai. In 1998, he visited Lijiang as a tourist in his early twenties. In 2008, after several visits to Lijiang, he made up his mind to quit his job in Shanghai and move permanently to Lijiang. Mr. Sang described his relocation as a form of 'escape.' In his words:

It is really an escape from the Chinese bureaucracy and from the heavy burden of making money and seeking promotion. In addition to teaching, I used to spend most of my time dealing with complicated relations with my colleagues and my supervisor at the university. At that time, my daily life was a struggle. I did not want to be stuck there my whole life, so I quit. Moving to Lijiang was such a relief; this becomes my new home where I can do something for myself.

After settling in Lijiang's Old Town, Mr. Sang enjoyed his life as a new Lijiang resident: waking up naturally, buying vegetables at the local farmer's market, doing Tai chi at the square, or dining and drinking tea with friends in the courtyard house. He was also active in many voluntary organizations led by other new residents like him, such as the Old Town Firefighter Association. These activities allowed him to meet many Chinese travellers from other cities with similar backgrounds and aspirations. For this reason, he quickly built friendships and started to organize social and cultural activities with his new acquaintances. He also met his partner at these occasions; they got married in 2013. Their marriage reinforced his decision to settle down in Lijiang.

As in the case of Mr. Sang, Lijiang is not only a place of indulgence, freedom, pleasure and recreation, but also a place where new residents can develop a community that shares similar symbolic forms, morals, values and language. Unlike in their previous urban homes, new residents feel such community building is crucial at this stage of their life, enabling them to be recognised and valued by groups of like-minded people. The formation of a sense of place is centred on the emotional attachment to their new home. They believe that their new home in Lijiang is more authentic, purer, and simpler than the places they come from.

The second story concerns Wang and Yan, the couple I introduced in the previous chapter. In the summer of 2012, a year after we had met at their wedding ceremony in the courtyard, I met Yan at the Café de Duoduo, a place owned by the couple. I arrived at the café early, and found that it was actually a book café. It offered a number of books, covering a wide range of topics like romance, leisure, music, and travelling, all topics that are popular among backpackers and tourists. The entire café was quiet and cosy, jazz music was playing, with a smell of coffee beans in the air. Several cats were sitting or lying on shelves and couches across the room. I ordered a cappuccino and a piece of cheesecake, both of which, the waitress claimed, were homemade.

Yan arrived, and apologized that Wang could not meet me as he was on a business trip outside of Yunnan Province. She talked about the happy

memory of their wedding ceremony, and her new life after their marriage in Lijiang. In the past two years, Wang and Yan had been very successful in their guesthouse business. 'We cannot forget the date of 26 April, 2010,' Yan remembered,

The day when we cleaned our first guesthouse, set up the fire pit, and waited for the arrival of our first group of guests. That night, the sunset of Lijiang was so beautiful. We made a fire pit in the entrance of the house. We sang, we danced, and we drank our home-grown plum wine around the fire. After that night, many people in Lijiang remember the name 'Blossom Hill.'

The Blossom Hill Inn has since then become a chain business. They opened eight branches in Lijiang, and developed businesses in other historic towns such as in Shangri-La in Yunnan, Wuzhen in Zhejiang, and Langzhong in Sichuan. All of these towns had recently been promoted as 'old towns' for heritage tourism. Instead of running cheap quality hostels for backpackers, their strategy was to redesign traditional courtyards into luxurious guesthouses in order to attract high-end domestic and international tourists – a successful business model in many of these 'old towns.'

Yan was very satisfied with her life as a new Lijiang resident. Since Yan's mother had come to Lijiang to take care of the granddaughter, she had sufficient time to manage the guesthouses and train the staff. This was not difficult for her, as she had been a professional in human resource management before settling in Lijiang. 'Actually, we hire a number of people from other cities, like the waitress you just met,' Yan explained. 'They normally stay and work for a short term as they are university students or young people who just want to experience life in a new place. In each branch, we also hire several Naxi workers to assist with the management and cleaning of the guesthouse.'

Compared to local Naxi, people like Sang, Wang and Yan have better business management and communication skills. They used their knowledge and marketing strategies to redesign local traditions based on Han Chinese tastes. These forms of branding and customization strategies are much more effective than local heritage tourism products such as the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. By combining the aesthetics of 'new' and 'old,' 'tradition' and 'modernity' in their representation of Naxi heritage, they have created a specific business design to meet the guests' needs for romantic consumption. In addition, these business migrants also pay greater attention to establishing a personal relationship with the officials from the local government.

Through participating in social groups and official events they are able to build ties and have a voice in local affairs. This helps them to accumulate social capital for their new business, gain social privilege, and successfully compete against local Naxi entrepreneurs.

### Resistance, Coping, and Departure

Lijiang, on the one hand, provides these guests with a temporary imagined world in which they can indulge in their hedonic desires and find new business opportunities. On the other hand, however, problems eventually arise. One of these problems concerns the state's manipulation of the tourism industry. On 1 June 2016, more than 800 hostels, guesthouses, and shops all over Lijiang refused to open their doors. They had made a collective decision to protest against the local government's insistence on collecting an 80 *yuan* (c. 16 USD) 'conservation fee' from foreign and domestic tourists. The shop owners, mainly migrants from other parts of China, complained that the seemingly arbitrary nature of the request was hurting their business. The three-day protest resulted in a dramatic decrease in tourist numbers, transforming the popular vacation spot into a ghost town.

Since the central government has not classified Lijiang as a scenic area or national park, according to the national law, charging tourists an admission fee is not allowed in the Old Town. To generate income for the conservation and development of the Old Town, in 2001 the Heritage Bureau introduced a 'conservation fee,' a local administrative charge allegedly aimed at supporting heritage conservation. The conservation fee did not bother tourists in the beginning, as there were no strict enforcement measures in place, but this changed in July 2015 when the Heritage Bureau established more than a hundred checkpoints in the Old Town. This policy suddenly caused large waves of criticism, while many tourists chose not to visit the Old Town during the daytime, as they were reluctant to pay the fee. This had driven down profits for most of the businesses, eventually leading to the 2016 protest.

The protest partially reflected the life of new Lijiang migrants in recent years. Scholars and the media have criticized the commercial development of Lijiang, arguing that decades of economic development and a flood of migrants and capital have changed the social and economic ecology of the Old Town (Chapter 2). As a response, local government offices such as the Heritage Bureau issued several policies to protect the local community. One of the regulations stipulates that local residential houses in the Old Town cannot be sold to outsiders (Su 2010; Zhu 2016). As a result, the rent of

these residential houses has dramatically increased, due to the competition among migrant businesspeople. In addition, the local Heritage Bureau also imposed severe limitations on the approval of business licences.

The owners of local businesses, the majority of whom are from the coastal areas, have started to fight a regulatory framework that they see as impinging on their freedom and profits. The conservation fee came to be regarded as symbolic of the local government's claim over the right to regulate and speak for local culture. The question of who should own and profit from the culture has become the key issue in Lijiang's heritage management and governance. As Su (2012: 111) observed, Lijiang's migrants have contested the ownership arrangement of their business because many of them believe that they have been treated unfairly in terms of their competition with Naxi residents over business development. They argue, 'Lijiang is a World Heritage Site. It does not only belong to Naxi locals, but to the world.' Such a claim indeed facilitates an intentional strategy aimed at increasing their bargaining power with the local authorities.

In addition to tensions arising between the local government and outsider businesspeople over commercial issues, the customization of Lijiang's built environment had led many guests, including 'travellers' and lifestyle migrants, to gradually change their attitude towards their new home. While some of them, such as Sang, were nostalgic about the loss of the Lijiang that they witnessed during their visits in 1990s, others complained about the noise at nights, the crowdedness on the streets, and the inconvenience of shopping in the Old Town. In other words, their fantasy of Lijiang's romantic heritage had faded away.

In order to maintain their ideal life, new residents distance themselves from many of the exotic aspects of the place. Instead of engaging with a life in line with the native community and Naxi culture, new residents retain much of their behaviour and routines from their previous lives. Although some of them have lived in Lijiang for more than ten years, their daily routine is very much similar to the life they had in their hometown. They dine in modern restaurants, eat cheesecake, have coffee and read in cafés, drink French red wines in bars, play with pets at home, and pay for massages regularly. Despite becoming part of the local business community, they keep their distance from local residents, as they do not want to fully let go of the lifestyle they are accustomed to. Without any social connection to the local population, such strategy of distancing oneself from 'the local' enables them to explore the exotic while maintaining a self-customized new home.

To further distance themselves from the local, many migrants follow the footsteps of the original residents, and move to the New Town of Lijiang.

As shown in Chapter 4, local Naxi with homes in Old Town choose to rent their houses to outsiders and relocate to New Town (Su and Teo 2009). Along with the complaints about the living environment of the Old Town, these migrants experience a similar sense of 'being dispossessed' by mass tourists. Like the Naxi 'local actors,' migrants work in the Old Town during the daytime and return to the New Town at night. This commuting allows them to enjoy the traditional courtyard houses in the New Town while simultaneously being able to shop, dine, and enjoy a social life similar to the one experienced in their former, more urban home, without the discontent they experience in the Old Town.

Contrary to the local residents, the migrants or 'guests' have an additional strategy to improve their life quality. As Mr. Sang told me, even after moving to Lijiang he still kept his *hukou* and considered going back to Shanghai for medical treatment. The Chinese household registration system, *hukou*, classifies Chinese into 'urban' and 'rural' citizens.<sup>65</sup> As welfare benefits are associated with where they are registered, the *hukou* system limits labour mobility and thus urbanization. Keeping one's urban *hukou* registration allows people like Sang to maintain their entitlements to urban welfare.<sup>66</sup>

Another reason for migrants to keep their *hukou* is the disparity of educational quality between urban and rural areas. In recent years, as a part of the regional heritage tourism industry development, new infrastructures have been created around the Old Town of Lijiang, including an airport, a train station, and luxury hotels. However, only two colleges and local high schools are located in Lijiang. Most migrants are not willing to send their children to these schools; instead, they consider taking their children back to their hometown for a better education. Without giving up the *hukou* in their places of origin, these new Lijiang migrants can still benefit from the urban social welfare and pension systems in the cities while consuming the fresh air, ethnicity, and exoticism of the town.

65 After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Hukou Registration Regulation was established in 1958 – a household registration system inherited from ancient China to govern citizens' social welfare. The Chinese government used such regulations to control internal migration and preserve social stability. For instance, rural *hukou* holders could not receive the same benefits as urban dwellers, including their education, arranged employment and retirement benefits. Through such restrictions, the Chinese central government uses the *hukou* system to regulate individuals' daily lives and mobility.

66 This is the reason why many migrant workers move to cities like Beijing and Shanghai; they work very hard and hope one day they can obtain a municipal *hukou* registration to receive better welfare subsidies.



Yet not everyone is able to successfully manage this new reality and maintain his or her dream of romantic consumption in the town. Some of the migrants decide to become 'nomadic,' travelling between Lijiang and their hometowns. For instance, I heard from Yan in 2016 that she had decided to return to her home city Chongqing for most of the year; there she can find better education for her 5-year old daughter while developing her new career as owner and manager of a children's bookstore. Accompanied by her husband, Wang, Yan only briefly returns to Lijiang for business purposes – to take care of the eight guesthouses in the Old Town. Lijiang has gradually become a personal memory of a past adventure.

For Wang and Yan, Lijiang used to be their perfect home as it allowed them to escape from the city and provided an alternative career path. The place offered them the satisfaction of pleasure at their particular stage of life. Once they entered a new stage of life as parents, the objective context of daily life in Lijiang did not suit their needs any more. The practical issues that are closely associated with their *hukou*, such as the education and medical system, become critical components of their sense of home. However, such practice of relocation does not indicate the absolute disappearance of their previously expressed sense of home. Despite the fact that the new home making is tied with functional needs, their regular return to Lijiang might still temporarily evoke a certain sense of nostalgia about their own past.

Contrary to Yan, some 'guests' have not hesitated to leave Lijiang permanently. Both migrants and 'travellers' find themselves disillusioned and disappointed with their new home. As the single traveller Fei, for instance, argued, after staying for five months in Lijiang:

I used to love this place so much. I even dreamed of it as my home for the rest of my life. The first day when I arrived, I wrote in my blog that Lijiang is like a graceful lady. One day I suddenly realized that the place is ruined. Every night you see people get drunk and sleep with other people. It becomes so polluted. I feel my heart does not belong here anymore. I feel sick from staying here. I want to go home.

For Fei, the healing magic of Lijiang's romantic aura and its Naxi heritage did not last long; it only offered her a brief period of pleasure and comfort. Since she only stayed for five months, her discontent and frustration with Lijiang's commercialization does not arise from nostalgia for the past. Instead, it is the gap between her expectations and the reality that changed her attitudes towards the place. Keeping a distance from the tourist mainstream did not prevent her from eventually coming to terms with the reality of her new



home. The more she encountered the reality of Lijiang, the further away she grew from her imagined utopia, a gap which led to her decision to depart.

## Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, the traditional understanding of home and its connection with kin and family (such as filial piety in traditional Chinese society), are challenged by the high mobility of people searching for employment and opportunities to improve their lifestyles (Coles and Timothy 2004). Described as hybridity, inbetweenness and third space (Bhabha 2004), modern society allows us to move away from a world that was once primarily dominated by 'lifestyle[s] of regularity, repetition and cyclicity' (Seamon 1985: 227). As Sabine Marschall (2017: 4) argues in her book *Tourism and Memories of Home*, 'home' can be something familiar, safe, comfortable and deeply rooted in past memory or notions of origin, but it can also refer to something adventurous, imagined, and exotic.

The stories of people in Lijiang – of couples like Wang and Yan, the businessman Mr. Sang, or of single 'travellers' such as Fei – do not deny the processes of home searching; they, however, reveal a more complicated picture of romantic consumption in non-Han areas of China. Serving both purposes of comfort and capital accumulation, such romantic consumption of pleasure and happiness allows people to instantly consume a new sense of home while using professional skills to enter the local tourism industry as entrepreneurs.

While enjoying freedom, romance, and an exotic atmosphere in their escape from the urban life, these guests do not leave behind their materialistic, capitalistic, and consumerist privileges. As in the case of the artists and educators who moved their family from Beijing to Yi County in Anhui Province to open a café and an avant-garde bookshop (Krischer 2015), the social and cultural capital of migrants in Lijiang allows them to consume a romantic heritage without being exposed to the reality. Despite their powerful desire to pursue a new and authentic self or spiritual home, they have never left their original self behind. Being embedded in the capitalist and materialist desire, such an 'original self' serves as a loyal friend who accompanies and facilitates their adventure.

The stories of what happens 'after the show' further illustrate the nature of romantic consumption of heritage. No matter whether they are honeymoon couples, individual wanderers, or lifestyle migrants, Naxi traditions and the 'stage' of Lijiang fail to provide them with a permanent utopia of everlasting

comfort and relaxation. What they consume is not their own heritage and ethnic culture, but instead, as illustrated in the former chapters, it is the customized form of local people's heritage. The exoticness that heritage consumption offers becomes mere decoration for these guests' modern lifestyles. Serving primarily as a resource to fulfil their dreams, such a form of heritage consumption can only offer them a temporary satisfaction of hedonistic pleasure and liberalization.

Despite their endeavour to identify themselves as travellers or 'new Lijiang residents,' these 'guests' can never become the owners of local heritage. Once the 'magic effect' of tourism fades away and their pleasure is replaced by a daily struggle with the local environment, various forms of discomfort and tension arise. This dissonance undermines the temporary satisfaction of new residents to such an extent that they choose to either move to Lijiang's New Town or leave their newly established homes entirely to pursue their dreams. Departure for new rounds of searching and strategizing, their romantic consumption becomes a never-ending journey of linking the present to the past and the future.

After all, the tourism industry in Lijiang does not inform other tourists of these negative side effects of heritage tourism. Ultimately, while these 'guests' finally leave the town to continue their search for romantic consumption elsewhere or to move back into a life accommodating their needs, their disillusionment does not reduce the number of new incoming tourists with similar longings. In this sense, the image of the town as a heritage destination has created a cycle of people arriving and departing from Lijiang in search of romantic consumption.



## 7 Conclusion

The past is increasingly spoken of in the present tense.

– Lowenthal (2015: 594)

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) proposes two different histories of Europe by discussing upper-class Hindu Bengalis' encounters with modernity in the nineteenth century. The first version of History (with a capital H) refers to the rise of capitalism and the associated idea of progress, while the second type of history (with lowercase h) considers how people live in intimate and plural relationships, 'which allows us to make room for the politics of human belonging and diversity' (Chakrabarty 2000: 66-67). While the story of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is not about European history, Chakrabarty's interpretation of history and advocacy of pluralism does indirectly reflect on two levels of stories presented in this book.

Comparable to the rise of capitalism in Europe (Chakrabarty's capital H History), Chinese society has been strongly influenced by economic liberalization and waves of globalization. Today, having gone through 40 years of development triggered by economic reform and the open-door policy, China has moved into a new stage of modernization, framed by President Xi Jinping as the achievement of the 'Chinese Dream.' The 'Chinese Dream' envisions prosperity and nationalist glory within a socialist framework. The rhetoric implies a harmonious and splendid past that bolsters national identity and confidence in the future. Heritage and ethnic tourism play a pivotal role in this. The Chinese government's adoption of global discourses of heritage and tourism has become a powerful and effective tool to legitimize its cultural and social regulation, particularly over ethnic minorities – through defining and formulating local folklore, performing arts, and rituals.

For decades, the Naxi group has been regarded as a successful example of domestic ethnic management compared to other more politically sensitive groups. In contrast to Tibetan, Mongol, or Uyghur groups, Naxi do not claim nationhood. This group has been Sinicized through participation in the comprehensive Chinese education system, as well as through hundreds of years of social and commercial exchanges. They were in alliance with the Han Chinese during the Tusi and Republic period, and are now willing to engage with heritage practices and tourism consumption in the modern People's Republic of China era.

In Lijiang, local governments, driven by their entrepreneurial interests, have become remarkable actors in shaping the heritage and tourism discourse. The booming heritage industry supports them in facilitating the imaginary of a glorious Naxi past, and to unify the Naxi group in commercialization under the influence of Chinese social modernity. Such a seemingly uniformed, linear, and unbroken past serves the construction of a modern and civilized Naxi identity in the nation state.

Since the early 2000s, the heritage tourism industry has pushed this process even further. The heritage and tourism discourse not only provides Dongba culture with high aesthetic and intellectual value, but it also enables its popularization in the tourism market and increases in its economic profitability. Cultural assimilation and commercialization both serve the national goal of a collective historical narrative. Government officials, social elites, Naxi historians, and tourism operators have all been active agents – albeit in different ways – in studying, representing, and displaying ‘Naxiness.’ Formerly repressed as symbols of superstition, Naxi wedding customs, Dongba religious practices, and related music and dance have been revitalized and transformed into a new form of culture.

Conversely, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard embodies Chakrabarty’s second type of ‘history’: it is a story of how at different times, different groups of actors have plural engagements with their past and future. As a reflection of heritage tourism in Lijiang’s Old Town, the courtyard is simultaneously viewed as a platform for Naxi entrepreneurs to promote their own heritage, a channel for young local Naxi to pursue their dreams of success and modernity, an opportunity for urban middle-class Chinese to enjoy alternative forms of entertainment, and a place for migrant entrepreneurs to start new businesses and engage in new lifestyles. Although the state strongly dominates management of ethnic minorities and their heritage, as well as all other relevant discourses, these actors actively participate, accommodate, sometimes negotiate, and even resist the appropriation of their traditional culture for the sake of heritage and tourism development.

Some people or institutions are more powerful and authoritative than others, a fact that mainly stems from economic and political asymmetries. While the official heritage narrative is often more publicly visible than personal engagement with their past (Smith 2006; Zhu 2015), this book gives agency back to the individual whose sense of heritage is associated with emotional and subjective activities. For instance, cultural elites and local businesspeople like Prof. He or Mr. Liu claim that their heritage making is authentic and aimed at fighting against the erosion of social solidarities which are built on community ties, memory, and culture. Similarly, the

Dongba Fuhua performs his identity through engaging with a compromised vision of his religious rituals. Their relations with heritage and ethnicity are not based on standards, norms or laws, but on their embodied practice, a state of being, a sensuous feeling, or a personal experience (Wang 1999; Bagnall 2003; Zhu 2012a).

Both 'histories' – the story of the state-led heritage and ethnic tourism discourse and the story of the people – are based on the spread of capitalism and the emergence of modernity; however, they should be considered as inter-relational rather than two separate processes. There is no doubt that the state's hegemony of the heritage and tourism discourse (the making of stage) has its sociocultural and economic impacts on both local actors and guests. Meanwhile, people also have various ways of interpreting and revising their roles (scripts) by engaging with heritage and tourism practices.

### **Romantic Consumption and Customization**

The stories of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard also demonstrate the dialectic relationship between heritage customization and tourists' search for romantic consumption. In particular, it reflects two kinds of improvising strategies: the production of the 'Romantic' to meet guests' longing for the natural, the ethnic, and the sacred religious experience; and the production of the 'romantic' that offers tourists a taste of legendary love through their wedding ceremonies. In the courtyard, the combination of the Romantic and the romantic reflects people's interests in romantic love, the mysterious Dongba religion, and the exotic Naxi performance. The Naxi wedding ceremony package offers such consumption a flavour of creativity, self-expressiveness, and fantasy so that the heritage product can be experienced, appreciated, and celebrated.

How does romantic consumption and heritage customization impact different people in Lijiang and the courtyard? Guests travel to Lijiang for happiness, romance, and temporary relief from city life: however, these guests are not interested in the historical facts of the Naxi past; they are attracted by a romanticized past that serves their hedonistic desire and compulsion for experiencing the 'Other.' The romantic consumption of the Naxi past offers them an emotionally engaged, powerful, yet instant gratification. Such consumption fails to meet guests' needs in the long term, particularly those of lifestyle migrants. When their pleasure is replaced by the daily struggle with the local living environment, they soon realize that life in Lijiang is not so different from their past life. The desire for consuming

romance and an ongoing dissatisfaction with reality is bound to result in a never-ending journey of fantasy seeking.

The local people of Lijiang, meanwhile, attempt to find individual ways of developing and displaying Naxi heritage in order to compete with the Han Chinese-dominated tourism market. Heritage customization, as the key coping strategy of local actors, has resulted in various cultural products and local brands such as 'Encountering a Naxi Family,' 'Dongba Valley,' or 'Naxi Mama.' Lijiang is claimed to be authentic because it looks old, or simply because the Heritage Bureau, the Naxi experts, or the Dongba say so. Consequently, streets are paved to resemble 'old streets'; music is 'restored' to sound like ancient music; Dongbas must be elders with flowing white beards; and the town is renamed 'Old Town.' These products are not too different from the tourism businesses run by the external entrepreneurs. Despite claims of authenticity, their work is neither modern nor traditional, but an improvised performance to serve the needs of romantic consumption.

Being deeply uprooted from daily practice, the customization of local ethnic culture indeed transforms the status of local communities from 'owners' of their heritage to 'local actors.' Neither the state-led cultural policy nor market-driven commercialization offers them sufficient grounds to realign their traditions with their daily life. The older generation of local residents shows a sense of 'displacement,' since their community life has been interrupted and their home is now 'occupied' by the continuous influx of tourists and migrants. Many of them develop a sense of nostalgia – for an earlier period in Lijiang – which motivates people like Mr. Liu or the Dongba Fuhua to devise strategies to cope with the tourism market.

However, the emergent nostalgia for a lost past among senior Naxis cannot stop the mainstream community (particularly young people) from embracing the modern consumerist and materialistic world. For local young performers like Chao, Mei, and Maoniu, the authenticity of their performance is not that important. While embracing a modern and comfortable life in the New Town like other Chinese migrants, they work in the Old Town as 'local actors' and transform cultural resources into economic profits.

## Global Significance of a Local Courtyard

In 1976, a year before Valene Smith's seminal work on *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* was published, UNESCO claimed that tourism was 'more than an economic phenomenon with social and cultural effects, [it] has become a phenomenon of civilization' (UNESCO 1976, quoted in Picard and

Wood 1997, vii). Nowadays, after 30 years of development, tourism has become the biggest industry in the modern world. Tourists are the largest 'flow' of people (Appadurai 1990) and they create a particular global landscape fashioned along cultural and ethnic lines. The interface of communication between heritage and tourism has become more complex than ever. Tourism is far more than the production and the consumption of heritage; it facilitates the channels to 'construct and understand ourselves, the world, and the multilayered relationships between them' (Robinson and Smith 2006: 2).

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard is a story beyond Lijiang and China; it helps us to comprehend the social and political impact of heritage and tourism on cultures around the world. The significance of this study lies not only in the tensions between production and consumption – the battle between historical/scientific facts and subjective/emotional interpretations of the past – but how the heritage and tourism industries harness and transform *ethnic, cultural, and social* components of a society or a place in a soft but powerful way.

Ethnicity is highly political. It is often associated with conflicts, particularly with political struggles in various parts of the world. Each nation, no matter what their position at the global political table may be, promotes ethnic tourism as a means to legitimize itself as a territorial entity (Robinson and Smith 2006: 2). Countries, especially in Asia, domesticate global heritage and tourism discourses to sanction a particular notion of ethnic diversity and nationhood. As a consequence of institutionalization, the previously fluid, nested, and changeable ideas of ethnicity are transformed into a sanctioned ethnic culture that can be objectified and displayed. Ethnic tourism and cultural representation results in a process of 'museumization,' wherein objects, architecture, and fragments of scenery are retrospectively separated from daily life, and re-created and curated for external consumption (Zhu 2015).

Culturally, the globalization of heritage has had a greater influence on our societies than ever before. In the twenty-first century, the past (both as material remains and embodied knowledge) of human beings have been frequently transformed into heritage and used in a variety of ways. We destroy relics to forget dark memories; we appreciate historic buildings to celebrate human wisdom; we revisit ashes of ancestors to search for moral values; we list World Heritage Sites to build universal connections. All of these efforts reflect our modern minds, senses, interests, and desires.

As one key aspect of the uses of heritage, tourism is all about the present, or more precisely, a conscious creation of the present, with history being interpreted and packaged for consumption (Timothy and Boyd 2003). UNESCO never intended for the World Heritage list to become an ever-expanding tour guide to hundreds of wonders in the modern world. In



reality, however, World Heritage Sites, such as Luang Prabang or Venice and its Lagoon, have become symbolic attractions in cultural tours and tourism marketing (Salazar and Zhu 2015). Some of these sites, such as the Forbidden City, showcase a link between the present and the past and the progress of a rising nation with a rich civilization; others, like Machu Picchu, focus on a romantic and exotic image of ethnicity. Through renaming, branding, categorizing, listing, and performing heritage, the past of these heritage sites is thus transformed into an aesthetically pleasing and economically valuable representation to satisfy modern desires of romantic consumption.

Socially, in this process of designing and objectifying heritage for certain political and economic agendas, tourism often becomes a battlefield of power that results in conflicts among various groups (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000). As happened in Tanzania (Salazar 2012) or Egypt (Meskell 2005), frictions between the forces of global tourism and the local community often become the central focus of debates (Tsing 2005). These issues include, but are not limited to, rising land prices, processes of replacement and gentrification, dramatic changes in lifestyles, as well as misunderstandings due to the interaction between social structures and expectations.

Scholars often focus on the representation of the oppressed and seek to give voice to the marginal. We often intend to show sympathy to the people who have been evicted, and applaud the local community that wins the battle against external entrepreneurs. However, if we take a closer look at these forms of resistance, none of the people's complaints concern the ideology of cultural heritage and ethnic tourism. Neither do these practices directly target the governmental use of heritage and ethnicity for local development and tourist consumption. The critical responses by local communities often only emerge once their individual or collective interests, such as personal or commercial rights, have been threatened.

As David Lowenthal (2015: 595) observed in his study of modern society, people either praise heritage for fostering their own perceptions or condemn heritage for failing to conform to these perceptions. In this sense, despite different agendas and responses, the governmental officials, private investors, tourists, and the local communities are on two sides of the same coin. They are all embedded in the ephemeral nature of heritage tourism and the magical realism of romantic consumption. Beholden to pragmatism, they use heritage as an instrument to pursue their present desires and instant pleasure. Through revisiting, revising, and even rejecting heritage, the legacy of the past becomes the foundation of the present and the newly envisaged future: their imaginaries of romantic consumption, their motivation to find a new home, and eventually their departure for another journey.

## Epilogue: The Show Must Go On

In 2015, I went back to Lijiang and visited the courtyard again. At the entrance, the two Chinese characters meaning 'double happiness,' the two red lanterns, and the banner of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard were still hanging on the doors. Like many times before, I opened the wooden door. Yet to my astonishment, I only saw pieces of wood and frames, cracked chairs, and tables lying around. Two workers were chatting and smoking. The place was under renovation. They confirmed that Mr. Liu had given up the Naxi wedding service and planned to transform the place into a Naxi restaurant. After all the happy banquets that I had witnessed there, with people dancing, singing, and toasting, it was striking to see how things had turned out.

The next day, I met Mr. Liu at his office. As before, he was busy with dozens of projects. Our one-hour chat was interrupted no less than five times by different phone calls. Mr. Liu told me that the cultural industry business had not gone very well in the last couple of years. With a reduction in customers, his business had declined. The Heritage Bureau had stopped their financial support due to lack of revenue, so it had been difficult for the company to maintain the business. Some businesspeople from Sichuan had acquired the management rights of many of his courtyards and renovated them into luxury hostels, but some of the courtyards still maintained their exhibitions of Naxi culture. He was disappointed about the demise of his project: 'it was a good idea! This was the reason that I invested so much time and money in it. We had made many efforts, and also saw some good results and success. But it's hard to maintain, so I had to give up the project. Maybe I was a bit too idealistic. A restaurant is not a perfect idea, but at least a sustainable way.'

I also wanted to learn what had happened to the Dongba Fuhua. Mr. Liu told me that he left the courtyard, but had remained in Lijiang. Fuhua did not wish to return to farming in his local village; staying in Lijiang allowed him to support his daughter's studies at the local high school. He now worked at the Snow Mountain bookstore, a government-supported Naxi bookstore where the Heritage Bureau regularly organized lectures about Naxi culture. Sometimes Fuhua also worked as a Dongba calligrapher at a new tourist theme park. I visited him at his new workplace, where he was writing Dongba scripts and practicing his chanting. The director of the Naxi Snow Mountain store, a respected local scholar, had encouraged Fuhua to continue his work on Dongba culture.

On my way back from my visit to Fuhua, I passed by the Naxi Mama guesthouse. During my absence, they had established a second hostel on the same street. Instead of continuing to target backpackers, they had learned from businesses from other cities and had decorated it as a luxury hotel. At the time, their daughter was six years old. He Gang told me that the Naxi Wedding Courtyard used to be his daughter's favourite place. He Gang was sad the place was gone, recalling that he used to bring his daughter to the courtyard after dinner to take part in the singing and dancing.

I also met Chao, the photographer and the groom performer from the courtyard, at Chao's new office. Chao had held high expectations that Mr. Liu would eventually promote him after his wedding. However, this did not happen. In 2013, Chao left the company and started his own business in floor designing, a totally different field from his early work. Now his son was five years old. While playing with his son, we chatted about his new business and life. As he explained,

I have not been back for years. Many things have changed. We had a really happy time when all of us were in the courtyard – we worked together, met different people from different cities and tried to make them happy. But the good times never returned. I had to take care of my family. I hope we can enjoy the same lifestyle as the immigrants. We can go to the café, afford a house, and go shopping with my wife at the luxury stores. I cannot do anything without money. Now I have my own business. I know it's a bit hard at this early stage, but I can see the future getting brighter and brighter.

At Chao's suggestion, I invited some of the other former 'actors' out to dinner. Nowadays young Naxi people prefer to live in the New Town. They think the bars and restaurants in the Old Town are only for tourists. After we all had dinner together at a hotpot restaurant on the Yumi River, the commercial zone in the New Town, we went to the Lishui bar, which had recently opened the year before. Many of the former courtyard employees had not changed, although some had gotten married, Mei had a son, and one of the girls was pregnant. Most of them had grown up in nearby villages, and had recently developed new ideas about careers, consumption, and family planning through their encounters with tourists and immigrants from other Chinese cities. Their dreams shifted and they now sought forms of success that aligned with urban life. They hoped to be economically independent, and would soon be able to establish their own businesses. Although these former employees were motivated and inspired by their time at the Naxi Wedding

Courtyard, they eventually had to leave in order to search for better careers in Lijiang and beyond.

They sang various Chinese and English popular songs in the bar, in a style that was very different from their previous performances in the courtyard. They made jokes about each other, guessing who had a crush on whom. They complained about the hard times that they had in the courtyard, and wished each other a brighter future. The party ended late that night. When we said goodbye, they waved at each other, just as they had done before when it was time to bid their guests farewell at the end of the show. Nobody knows what the future holds for the Naxi Wedding Courtyard after it becomes a restaurant, but all the people who had worked there will still continue their journey in the Old Town, a place so full of memories that they are not willing to let go.



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