

## The Appearance of the Rural in China's Tourism

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State-led programs for rural development through tourism serve to reaffirm and reinstate rural spaces as the *ideal* periphery, a desirable and attractive 'decorative edge' to the modern, contemporary Chinese nation. By tracing the ways in which tourism development both centralizes the necessity of modernizing rural regions for the nation as a whole while simultaneously emphasizing the 'otherness' of rural communities in order to promote them as tourist attractions, in this essay I seek to understand how 'the rural' appears in Chinese tourism as a vital concern of the state by characterizing what is rural as increasingly different and distant in order to satisfy perceived tourist desires. In particular, the Chinese state represents village-based tourism projects through discourses of distance that render 'the rural' both absolutely critical to national processes of development and fundamentally peripheral to modern conditions.

The focus of this paper is the examination of two publications that deal specifically with the formation, regulation and significance of 'the rural' in tourism development: a widely circulated statement from 2007 by the chairman of the China National Tourism Administration, Shao Qiwei, titled *Develop Rural Tourism, Accelerate the Building of a New Countryside* (*fazhan xiangcun lüyou cujin xin nongcun jianshe*), and a guidebook on operating tourism businesses *Peasant Family Happiness: Guidebook for Tourism Business* (*nong jia le: lüyou jingying zhinan*) published in 2007 by the China Agricultural Press in their series *New Village, New Youth Library* (*xin nongcun, xin qingnian wenku*). My analysis considers the practices and ideas suggested by these publications in light of ethnographic observations from two tourism villages in order to explore how state discourses of rurality are

reforming the spaces within villages, and the socio-economic place of particular villages within broader regional networks. Tourism becomes a way to keep distance between the rural and ‘the rest’ of China – to make the rural the edge of the nation, and thus maintain its attractiveness as a destination – and yet to simultaneously promote the inherent connectedness of the rural to the nation through domestic travel.

It is in the simultaneous aestheticization of the rural through tourism and the centrality of the rural in state policies, such as the ‘New Socialist Countryside’ programs, that the appearance of the rural takes shape as part of new spatialized understandings of contemporary China. By using the word ‘appearance’ I mean to signal both the physical, material conditions of rural life in China today as well as the conceptual and political attention paid to rural places and regions by the central governing institutions.

### **2006: The Centrality of the Rural**

National development in China has been necessarily viewed as a process of industrialization and, more recently, as urbanization. Thus, government plans have emphasized measures and policies aimed at helping rural regions achieve urban, industrial conditions. In 2006, China’s national state government revealed plans to build a ‘New Socialist Countryside’ (*shehui zhuyi xin nongcun*) in its 11th Five-Year-Plan, with revitalized focus on improving rural livelihoods and extending the benefits of China’s rapid modernization into rural areas. The ‘New Socialist Countryside’ program has paid explicit attention to rural regions, not unlike how the ‘Open up the West’ campaign redefined socio-economic progress for the west in China (Goodman, 2004). At the same time, 2006 was also named the ‘Year of Rural Tourism’ (*2006 zhongguo xiangcun liuyou*) by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA).<sup>1</sup> The declaration of the ‘Year of Rural Tourism’ was also a

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<sup>1</sup> The China National Tourism Administration identifies for a theme for each year; 2005 was the ‘Year of Red Tourism’ in China, while in 2009, the theme was ecotourism.

concerted project to reconceptualize the relationship between rural and urban populations in China. According to CNTA, rural tourism could not only help establish the role of tourism industries in building a 'New Socialist Countryside' but it would also provide new opportunities in domestic tourism for the country's urban residents (CNTA, 2007, 93).

Tourism was lauded as an ideally balanced socio-economic formula that could increase rural labor while simultaneously boosting urban leisure. Certainly in terms of reported numbers, the national attention paid to rural tourism seemed to pay off: in 2007, the National Tourism Administration reported that 60% of urban tourists (or 107 million) traveling over the May 1, 2007 'Golden Week' Holiday period chose rural tourism destinations (Available at:

<http://www.china.org.cn/> (2007). Accessed 21/09/2009).

For the country as whole, however, the composition of what is formally recognized as rural has actually been in decline. Official numbers from the National Bureau of Statistics reported that at the end of 2006, 54% of the Chinese population (737 million out of 1.3 billion) was categorized as 'rural'. This was the lowest ever reported rural population for the country. In 2001, 64% of the population was categorized as rural, and in 1990 the percentage stood at 74% (Available at: <http://news.xinhuanet.com/> (2007). Accessed 04/02/2009). The increasing urbanization of the population, however, meant that the economic gap between urban and rural Chinese was also growing significantly greater. In 2006, urban disposable incomes in China averaged 11,760 RMB, while rural net incomes were just one third of this amount, at 3587 RMB (Guizhou Statistical Bureau, 2007, 22).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Urban disposable incomes (*chengzhen jumin kezhipei shouru*) are defined as the 'per capita annual disposable income of urban households', using the formula: disposable income = total household income-income tax-personal contribution to social security-subsidy for keeping household diary. Rural net incomes (*nongcun juminren junchun shouru*) are defined as the 'annual per capita net income of rural residents' using the formula: net income=total income-taxes and fees-household operating expenses-depreciation of durable goods-subsidy for participation-gifts for non-rural relatives (Guizhou Statistical Bureau, 2007, 22).

The ‘New Socialist Countryside’ as directed at precisely these socio-economic inequalities between urban and rural living conditions, standards and opportunities. In details made public in February 2006, in tandem with the first official mention of the New Socialist Countryside policy, the government announced gradual phasing out of the agricultural tax, increased subsidies for rural health insurance, and the elimination of fees for compulsory education, including the removal of fees levied for books and heating school buildings. According to a Chinese media report quoted in the UK newspaper *The Guardian*, ‘Constructing a new socialist countryside is an important historic task in the process of China’s modernization (....) The only way to ensure sustainable development of the national economy and continuous expansion of domestic demand is to develop the rural economy and help farmers to become more affluent’ (Watts 2006, para. 5).

More than aiming to improve the financial status of rural residents, however, the New Socialist Countryside policy has placed emphasis on building higher quality and better looking village housing. Recent independently produced Chinese documentary films, such as Cong Feng’s *An Unfinished History of Life* (2010) and in particular Guo Hengqi’s *New Castle* (2010), show the public display of construction plans and drawings of new buildings, schools, and houses in communities that have been subject to the ‘New Socialist Countryside’ program. In 2010, I met an entrepreneur in Kaili, Guizhou province, who had hired a local videographer to create a 20 minute promotional DVD about the tiled, modern, wood-burning stoves that his company installed in rural village homes. This new type of stove, he explained to me, had already been recognized by the local prefectural government as part of the ‘New Socialist Countryside’ programs for villages this part of southeastern Guizhou, and the video featured clips of local government officials visiting nearby villages and comparing the safety and hygiene benefits features of the new, tiled stoves against the older versions. In order to drum up further business for himself, this entrepreneur said he

planned to distribute the DVD to additional relevant government offices in the townships surrounding Kaili. The images in his promotional video include numerous side-by-side comparisons of the older styled stoves, often made of wood or brick darkened by years of soot and ash, next to gleaming, white tiled stoves that, he explained, were not only more sanitary but also required less wood, thus saving the rural households both time and energy.<sup>3</sup>

In my own fieldwork on tourism in Upper Jidao, an ethnic Miao village in southeastern Guizhou province, the plans launched after 2006 to build a ‘New Socialist Countryside’ were based on continuing efforts to develop rural tourism (Oakes, 1998).

While the attention given to rural tourism in 2006 was therefore not entirely surprising, how rural tourism came to fit with national ideas of social progress and economic development was new in its emphasis on making ‘the rural’ a worthwhile and valuable category within China’s national development.

Tourism in rural China was alive and thriving throughout the country well before the designation of 2006 as the Year of Rural Tourism recognized the reality of tourism trends in China, while it expressed the state’s desires and expectations for what rural areas could mean for the nation. At stake was not only the relative success or failure of a government development programs, but rather, the extension of deep understandings of rural and urban, as categories of place, and their value in the Chinese nation-state. By relying upon metaphors of geography and the state, discourses of distance both reinstated the rural, as utterly central to the nation’s development, and substantiated differences between the rural and the urban for the satisfaction of urban tourist desires. More recent policies and statements on urban-rural development across China also point towards a shift in treating rural areas as increasingly central to national progress. In 2007, the China National Tourism Association signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture to ‘jointly promote rural tourism development

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<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted in September 2010, Kaili, Guizhou province.

and the construction of new socialist rural communities' (Gao, Huang and Huang, 2009, 5) in the coming years. Moreover, the 2008 Urban-Rural Planning Law, aims directly at improving the administration of urban *and* rural planning while in Guizhou, in 2010, a statement on rural urbanization emphasized the necessity of investing more heavily in rural tourism as a part of the overall development strategy (Shi, 2010).

### **Develop Rural Tourism and Peasant Family Happiness**

One of the most frequently cited articles about the relationship between the Year of Rural Tourism and the 'New Socialist Countryside' campaign, was written by the director of the China National Tourism Administration, Shao Qiwei, and circulated widely online. It was also published in *Seeking Truth (qiu shi)*, the ideological journal of the Chinese Communist Party. In this essay, titled *Develop Rural Tourism, Accelerate the Building of a New Countryside* (2007), Shao makes explicit the role of rural tourism development in not only increasing the types of work and income-generating activities possible in rural areas, but also in contributing to improvements in rural 'quality' (*suzhi*). The key principle behind rural tourism and rural development, Shao writes, is to 'use tourism to help peasants' (*yi you zhu nong*). He lists five specific ways in which rural tourism contributes to positive development in rural regions by promoting and advancing: 1) the industrialization of agriculture, 2) village production and household prosperity, 3) the developmental *suzhi* and civilization of rural residents, 4) environmental protection and sustainable development, and 5) grassroots village democracy and governance. Shao's third point requires some further explanation; here, he writes, tourism 'benefits the raising of rural people's quality, local customs, and civilization of the countryside' (Shao 2007, para. 4).<sup>4</sup> Increasing 'civilization' in the countryside, Shao

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussions on the concept and discourses of 'quality' (*suzhi*) as it has been deployed in China over the past decade or so, see Kipnis (2006); Anagnost (2004); Woronov (2009), Yan (2003), and Murphy (2004), amongst others. On the Chinese notion of civilization (*wenming*) and various forms of civilizing programs in the post-reform era, see, for example, Anagnost (1993); Wang (2001); Duara (2001); Friedman (2004); Chio (2010).

continues, includes the introduction of new ideas and concepts from the city, better education, learning to speak standard Mandarin Chinese and foreign languages, and learning to use computers. All of these specific features of civilization, Shao concludes, will increase the *suzhi* of rural residents. As such, Shao argues, rural tourism development is a vehicle for the creation of a harmonious socialist society by increasing understanding between rural farmers and urban tourists—thereby obliquely implying that this process requires raising the ‘quality’ of rural farmers but without any comparable, civilizing work needed to be done on the part of the presumably urban tourist.

Shao stresses the need for local governments to incorporate rural tourism development directly into ongoing local development schemes, and specifically into the ‘New Socialist Countryside’ plans. These efforts will augment the existing belief in the importance of increasing opportunities for rural residents to pursue economic activities in rural areas, an ideal neatly summarized in the slogan, ‘leave the fields without leaving the countryside’ (*li tu bu li xiang*). To make the shift from small-scale agricultural production and/or subsistence farming to tourism enterprises, rural people must incorporate the charm and soul of rural traditions and livelihoods into their tourism efforts, Shao argues. However, although rural tourism can be a part of the new countryside, it ‘cannot be that, as a result of development, new villages are built without agriculture, vernacular architecture, peasants, or (other) unique characteristics’ (Shao 2007, para. 10). He emphasizes the necessity of adequate management structures in rural tourism and to pay attention to local opinions in the process, and while community participation should be encouraged, rural residents cannot be forced to adopt tourism.

Finally, Shao concludes by reiterating the overall importance of properly executing tourism development within larger plans for the ‘urbanization’ of the countryside, the ‘new’ peasant, and the modernization of agricultural industries. He reminds readers that rural

farmers should have the choice of how and if to develop and participate in tourism, and that rural tourism should also take into account the relationships between tourism and other rural industries and the rural environment. The overall goal of rural tourism must be to supplement and augment rural livelihoods.

The business model often referred to for rural tourism is known as '*Nong Jia Le*' loosely translatable as 'Peasant Family Happiness' (Lin, 2007; Sha and Wang, 2006).<sup>5</sup> In tourism development, this model implies the construction of 'rural' or, more often than not, suburban guesthouses and restaurants. Such tourism facilities are often located near cities, while the name is frequently applied to any rural-themed restaurant or guesthouse whether in rural or urban areas. *Nong Jia Le* tourism emerged in 1987 in the village of Long Quan Feng outside Chengdu, Sichuan, and the phrase has also been used for holiday villages near Beijing, Shanghai and other metropolitan cities (Yang, 2007). As a business model, these enterprises can be fully integrated into the policy of 'using tourism to help peasants' as demonstrated by the handbook on how to run a Peasant Family Happiness business (Yang, 2007), which gives detailed instructions on the features of such enterprises, including how to set prices and publicize business, how to prepare food and guestrooms, and how to be proper hosts. According to this publication, *Nong Jia Le* businesses are characterized by low overhead costs and rapid returns on investments. The model emphasizes participation, from both village residents and tourists, and celebrates rural, agricultural traditions and cultures (Yang, 2007, 3).

In chapter one, the manual introduces the word *nong* to explain how *Nong Jia Le* is based on agriculture, village and rural materials, and rural sight-seeing, in which the village

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<sup>5</sup> Other scholars have translated this as 'Joyous Village Life' (Donaldson, 2006) and 'Happy Farmer's Home' (Gao, Huang and Huang, 2009), but I believe that, as a translation, 'Peasant Family Happiness' best captures both the product on offer to tourists, the happiness of a rural, peasant family lifestyle with the associated ideas of simplicity, and the socio-economic ambitions to be achieved through this type of business enterprise, namely a happy rural, family. However, for consistency, when discussing the elements of this type of tourism enterprise, I use the Chinese name, *Nong Jia Le*.



itself provides the resources for tourism development (Yang, 2007, 3). But perhaps more important than the rural environment to the business model is the role of peasant family *affect* (*nongjia qinqing*) in building successful rural tourism (4). This is a new dimension of the rural in China's development, and the deployment of the rural in justifying particular policies and programs, by moving the significance of what is rural from economy (and modes of production) to the realm of sociality and interpersonal relations. The guide emphasizes that through 'personable, familial service, guests will experience a feeling of 'coming home' (4). Indeed, the manual continues by explaining the phrase 'making the guest a family relation' (*be keren dang qinren*), stressing that even though the tourist is a consumer; the service provided should be at the level of the familial (4).

Chapter two of the manual details concepts and methods related to the development of tourism resources, first by outlining the different types of cultural tourism resources: landscape, water, animal, architectural/historic, relaxation/activity-based, and shopping sights and experiences (Yang, 2007, 18). For rural tourism, such resources can be loosely grouped into two overall categories: natural tourism resources (lakes and rivers, animals, and general environmental atmospheres) and human cultural resources (materials of historical and heritage value, crafts and craft techniques, and parks and museums) (19). Establishing a market for tourism requires a comprehensive understanding of the available resources and tourist desires, in addition to management considerations such as safety, low overhead and environmental protection. After all, the manual instructs, *Nong Jia Le* tourism products should consider the ability for tourists to experience, to see with their own eyes, to use their own hands, to both play and work' (29).

A final essay further illuminates how discourses of the rural are embedded and made meaningful within the general progress of China's development. In *Philosophical Thoughts on the Era of Nong Jia Le*, Lin Hesheng (2007) considers the model's potential negative

effects on rural people. Recalling an anecdote about a *Nong Jia Le* business owner who grew organic produce only for consumption by his family while continuing to serve chemically fertilized vegetables to the tourists, Lin asks if this state of affairs is a result of the influence of the city tourists or by the corruption of rural peasants (Lin, 2007, 89). In consideration of its social and psychological effects, Lin supports the positive potential of the *Nong Jia Le* as a rural tourism model but concludes by calling for a post-modern form of *Nong Jia Le* – one where urban tourists enjoy the countryside, and the rural hosts participate not only for economic profit but also out of enjoyment (90). Thus again we find how rural tourism development is redefined, from emphasis on rural as economic production toward humanistic qualities of affection, feeling, and ideas of personal fulfillment. In these ways, policies and programs aimed at rural communities are bound tightly with explicit attempts to construct a new Chinese countryside, a new Chinese tourist, and a new Chinese peasant.

Rural tourism in China makes claims on the rural as a social identity, by commercializing nostalgia for rural lifeways and, in rural ethnic minority regions, by highlighting ethnic minority traditions as a valuable resource for creating and sustaining the appeal of tourism in ethnic minority, rural areas. This model of tourism is flexible enough to adopt ethnic characteristics as a basis of increasing rural cash incomes, while also to seeking to raise the ‘quality’ of ethnic minorities by modernizing through tourism (Hillman, 2003; Kolås, 2008; Oakes, 1998, 2006; Notar, 2006; Schein, 1999, 2000). In this way, tourism is expected to perform a ‘double duty’ for ethnic minority communities, by addressing low economic growth and beliefs about low levels of social development amongst ethnic minority communities. The synergistic effects of these discourses and policies inform the everyday experiences of communities and individuals living in rural, ethnic tourism destinations. Successfully conducted, *Nong Jia Le* tourism, and the new rural tourism regions such

businesses create, are seen as capable of providing both economic happiness to rural villages and social-psychological happiness to both new peasants and urban tourists.

### **Keeping your distance: The ideal periphery**

These publications on rural tourism and its development, including elements of national policies for modernization and rural urbanization, indicate the degree to which rural regions of China have been demarcated as spaces of both problems and potential. My ethnographic investigations of rural, ethnic minority tourism villages and rural tourism regions in Guizhou province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region further illuminate the scales at which spatial and social distances are evoked in order to more firmly situate the ‘rural’ as the ideal periphery of the modern Chinese nation. For residents of the two tourist villages I have studied, Upper Jidao, a Miao village in Guizhou located approximately 25 kilometers from the city of Kaili, and Ping’an, a Zhuang village in Guangxi located 90 kilometers from the city of Guilin, the new rural is a highly material, tangible process of construction – a matter of literally creating a space that may encompass and embody contemporary ideas of rurality. As such, the appearance of the rural takes place on at least two levels of representation – that of the visual and that of the political. At their intersections we find revealed particular strategies through which the rural is being made more palatable and more peripheral in processes of China’s contemporary development.

Regionalism in rural tourism has resulted in a simultaneous desire to incorporate villages into ‘scenic areas’ (*jingqu*), such as the Longji Terraced Fields Scenic Region in Guangxi which encompasses 13 villages, including Ping’an, in which about five are actively promoted as tourism destinations, and a recognition of the need to make each destination within a region as different as possible from each other. For Upper Jidao in Guizhou, the village was first been considered part of a larger ‘Bala River Rural Touring Zone’ including seven villages total, but with the demise of that previous tourism plan, Upper Jidao now is

marked together (visually, in terms of sharing a similar sightseeing viewpoint and signage) with four other nearby villages. But, as residents of Upper Jidao made clear to me in 2010, most tourists coming to this part of Guizhou were now all headed to Xijiang, which in 2008 was entirely redeveloped with funds from the county government in Leishan and provincial offices for a total tourism makeover, complete with entry ticket sales, a brand new larger performance space, scenic cobbled paths, and a management company that drove its own electric vehicles throughout the village. It is perhaps because the content of rural tourism is generally perceived as quite simple, as exemplified in Shao's statement and the Peasant Family Happiness handbook, that within a given region, the threat remains that one village may usurp all the others by being more comprehensively rural and touristic. As I have noted elsewhere, village residents and local officials were well aware of the dangers of being too close, geographically and touristically, to other tourism destinations, and early on in the plans for the Bala River Rural Touring Zone, attempts were made to create unique, distinguishing characteristics for each of the seven villages incorporated into the program (Chio, 2009, 215-216).

Distance from the city frequently determines the level of economic success achievable by a rural tourism village, and for both Upper Jidao and Ping'an, their location in a deliberately constructed and widely advertised tourism region was expected to help facilitate their development. As noted earlier, Ping'an is a two hour bus ride from Guilin, a major tourism and transport hub in Guangxi and thus Ping'an is heavily visited by day tours, and Upper Jidao is a mere half-hour bus ride or drive from Kaili, which had itself rebranded the city as a tourism destination in 2008. The ideal rural village in tourism would be far enough away from the city to truly give the tourist a real experience of 'leaving it all behind', yet close enough to maintain ease of transport and a relatively modern standard of accommodation.

Within a tourist village, the emphasis on the rural in state policy and tourism planning has meant that villages have to redefine what it means to be rural – in actually existing spaces and built features. This process usually results in a renewed appreciation of ‘natural’ building materials, especially wood in Guizhou and Guangxi, so that the concrete walls of houses as well as glass windows are covered with wood planks in order to maintain the a unified, ideal outward appearance (*waimao*) of the village as a whole. Since new wood is considered to be less attractive than older, darker wood, villagers apply stain to the wooden planks to create a more weathered, authentic look. By contrast, I have observed that in villages without tourism development on the urban fringes of Guilin, Guangxi, and Kaili, Guizhou, housing built as part of the New Socialist Countryside program resembles suburban townhouses or row houses constructed of concrete or brick.

Another common strategy creates physical borders and distances between what is of value touristically and the rest of a village, creating a destination by isolating tourism resources from the rest of rural life. For example, plans developed in 2007 for Ping’an village, which is the most visited site in the Longji Terraced Fields Scenic Region, proposed the construction of a scenic road above the village from which tourists would view the terraced fields below, either by foot or from an electric shuttle bus (*Guilin Shi Qikexing Lüyou Guihua Zixun Youxian Gongsi*, 2008). While as of 2010 this scenic road had not yet materialized, the idea of disassociating the village from tourism in such a place like Ping’an suggests how distance manifests as a part of rural tourism development. Similarly, in Upper Jidao village, government plans for the village placed a proposed hotel on land just outside of the central village area (Guizhou Tourism Bureau, 2006), rather than the development of tourist accommodations inside actual family homes. This was partly in response to local Miao traditions, where visiting men and women, including married couples, always slept in separate houses, and bolstered by the belief that tourists would prefer a location just outside

the village. The decision to build a hotel outside of the main village marked certain spaces of rural life (namely, the village itself) as worth visiting, but not quite up to par in terms of actually accommodating modern, presumably urban, tourists (although as of 2010 the hotel was still less than halfway finished). Village residents and local government officials alike worried openly that material conditions of village life in Upper Jidao, from pigs raised under houses to chickens roaming freely on the paths and the absence of indoor plumbing, were obstacles too great to overcome, even for tourists who might be seeking an authentic rural experience. But the lack of any substantial numbers of tourist arrivals over the years left many village residents unconvinced by all of the plans, and by 2010, villagers began to reclaim the land that had previously been appropriated for various tourism related building projects, including a performance space and cultural center.

These tourism distances built into the landscape also raised unexpected consequences. During the 2000s in Ping'an, the widespread success of tourism meant that more and more large hotels were constructed. Yet the lack of space meant that they could only go up, rather than spread out, and many hotels rose to five stories in stark contrast to older houses which typically reached two, or at most three, stories. By 2010, the density of hotels in the village, and their unregulated installation of electrical wiring, had resulted in a frighteningly frequent number of fires. After a particularly large fire that engulfed one hotel, the local Longsheng county fire protection office sent representatives to the village for an inspection. The result was a new policy that declared a certain number of older, residential houses would be taken down to literally create space in the village. Any new buildings constructed in the village would have to be made primarily of concrete. This declaration reversed years of battles between the county construction bureau and the village, during which, for the purposes of tourism, it was determined that houses should strive to be made of wood in order to maintain a traditional look. In effect the villagers 'won', since they had historically argued with the

government in favor of concrete because concrete buildings were necessary for the construction of modern hotel kitchens, en suite bathrooms and air conditioners, and they were less likely to go up in flames.

Finally, at the scale of the nation, the potential success of rural tourism as a mechanism for the socio-economic development of rural village livelihoods and standards of living relies upon a constant tension between the maintenance of rural-urban differences, in order to satisfy tourist desires, and a closing of the discrepancies between rural and urban standards of living by building a 'New Socialist Countryside'. The campaign to 'Open up the West' regionalizes the country by collapsing geography and economic development, while the 'New Socialist Countryside', with its explicit focus on and centralization of the rural as the object of transformation, performs a discursive move by making the rural re-appear within a set of guidelines for the formation, significance, and regulation of the countryside. In recent years, both Gansu and Guizhou provinces have received loans from the World Bank for 'cultural and natural heritage protection and development' projects, within which rural tourism development plays a large role. Provincial and local governments in certain swaths of the country, therefore, are re-making themselves as ideal destinations for tourism, not the least through the reconstruction of the rural.

In these ways, tourism becomes part of a process of the creation of spaces, marked by signs and slogans, designed to increase associations between local place, identity, and rural experience. To be successful, these spaces of tourism must also maintain the distance between the rural and the urban in order to provide an experience that is distinctly different – whether through offering service that engages familial affect or through staining new wood to provide a more perceptible, local authenticity. By regionalizing and provincializing the rural, rural tourism policies, and the rural communities and livelihoods that they uphold become more central to China's national modernization. They situate the rural as necessarily and

perfectly peripheral to the state's national development and modernization plans. Even as the official rural population in China continues to decline, the appearance of the rural in national policies and programs maintains a preoccupation with a rural-urban dichotomy. That this boundary is increasingly being defined in terms of visual coherence, in both natural and built environments, consumable affective pleasantries, and socio-psychological development rather than economic production or modes of livelihoods indicates the limits by which the rural is to be incorporated into contemporary processes of modernization and development in China.

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