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Seeing Like a Minority: Political Tourism and the Struggle for Recognition in China

Uradyn E. BULAG

Abstract: This paper outlines the operation of what may be called “political tourism” in China, and analyses the role of the sensorial technology of “seeing” in the kind of narrative this tourism engenders. Beginning in 1950, the newly established People’s Republic of China launched an annual tradition of inviting non-communist elites to attend the May Day and the National Day (1 October) parades on Tiananmen Square in Beijing and in some metropolitan cities. Unlike contemporary ethnic tourism, wherein minorities and their cultures become the objects of the tourist gaze, Chinese political tourism aims at bringing minority leaders out of their putative “isolation”, treating them with hospitality, and ultimately making them “see with their own eyes” China’s “true face”.

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Keywords: China, ethnic minorities, the Chinese Communist Party, political tourism, seeing, struggle for recognition

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Introduction

In late September 2011, among the tens of millions of tourists visiting coastal China was a large party of over 130 ethnic minority tourists (少数民族参观团, *shaoshu minzu canguantuan*) dressed in their colourful ethnic costumes and led by Wu Shimin, a Han Chinese and deputy director of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. Selected from minority models of ethnic unity (民族团结模范, *minzu tuanjie mofan*), the tourists from 18 ethnic groups first gathered in Beijing on 20 September 2011, and were received by a state leader (国家领导人, *guojia lingdaoren*), Jia Qinglin, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. They then set off by high-speed train to Jiangsu province and Shanghai municipality, visiting science parks, high-tech factories, museums, and many other important sites. At every stop, they were met and entertained by top local leaders who proudly showcased their achievements to the starry-eyed minority visitors. Wu would then make speeches on behalf of the minority visitors expressing their gratitude for the hospitality and admiration for the coastal development (Guojia Minwei Bangongting 2011).

What do we make of such ethnic minority tourism? This was not a one-off event, but part of an annual tradition dating back to 1950; a tradition interrupted only by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). It is also a central part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) nationality work (民族工作, *minzu gongzuo*). As such, it is an elaborate operation at various administrative levels and involves all the 55 officially-recognised ethnic minorities in China, particularly their elites.

In this paper¹, I make a brief analysis of the extensive travels arranged by the newly founded Chinese communist state for a vast array of non-communist political leaders, such as ethnic minority leaders, Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT), Manchukuo and Japanese war criminals, leaders of non-ruling parties, overseas Chinese representatives, national bourgeoisies, and many others. What they had in common was their marginali-

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ty to the CCP and the new state it had established, the People's Republic of China (PRC). Here, I confine my focus to just one category of peripheral leaders: the ethnic minority elites. This study is historical, but it is intended to shed light on the current political processes. Moreover, the paper attempts to theorize about Chinese state ethnic minority relations through the lens of "seeing" in state organized tourism for minority elites.

Anthropological studies of socialist Chinese ethnicity tend to follow a theoretical perspective developed for Western colonial states. This perspective assumes a fixed route of journey from metropolis to the peripheral colonies, endowing the metropolis with an unexamined prowess, a non-socialized arrogance, and moreover, unrestrained violence. Predominantly influenced by Michel Foucault (1977), the colonial state is portrayed as all-seeing, panoptical, and governmentalizing through a structured visual representation, or what Timothy Mitchell (1988) calls "enframing", enabled by a set of techniques, such as dividing, containing, simulating, and so on. The colonial state purports to be exhibitionary, collecting ethnographic butterflies for anatomical examination under microscopes (Gregory 1994). In the Chinese context, the socialist state is said to have literally invented nationalities or *minzu* (民族), a critique that effects a simultaneous condemnation of the Chinese state and dismissal of nationalities as arbitrary products, which do not have any meaningful existence beyond their representational "objectified" life. Socialist China is characterized as an internal Orientalist regime, in which the state and its masculine agents cast lustful eyes on infantilized, feminized and eroticized minorities (Gladney 1994; Schein 1997).

As interesting and important as such a perspective may be, I suggest that the Chinese communist state is not simply a structural power delineation that imposes a top-down pressure, extending the reach of the state's military and taxation power to the remotest corner of the country; it is also an affective body in need of admiration, love or respect and, of course, fear from below and the periphery. I call this latter aspect of the Chinese state "centripetalism", a political desire for a gravitational orientation from the margin to the centre. The minority leaders' travels to the Chinese political and economic centres in the early socialist period were an important component of Chinese centripetalism. Key to this operation was the sensory technology of seeing, that is, the minorities and the peripherals' seeing of the majority Han Chinese people and region, and the political centre of the new China. The new China was as much an

exhibitionist regime displaying itself to the peripheral minority peoples as a voyeuristic one (cf. Freud 1957).

Let me foreground my main argument here. The Foucauldian approach to the state rightly emphasizes the state power in controlling society through seeing. In this approach, the state has eyes, indeed big eyes (Foucault 1977, 1980), but it does not appear to have either a face or a heart. This understanding perhaps underlies scholarly attempts to reveal the face or faces of the state (Taussig 1999; Fitzpatrick 2005). Nonetheless, it is the scholars who wish to tear the mask off the state face, an act that reaffirms the Foucauldian understanding that the state does not want to be seen. I argue, however, that the state not only has a face, but also a heart, and it is eager to be seen and felt by its citizens or subjects in a way favourable to itself. The control or management of the state image is consequential for its own legitimacy or survival, an imperative that is no less important than its own ability to maintain surveillance of its citizens or subjects. Thus, unlike the prisoners-cum-citizens in Bentham and Foucault's Panopticon who are seen by the state authority, but who themselves are blinded, in high socialist and contemporary China, citizens and would-be citizens have been forced to open their eyes to see what the Chinese state looks like and will look like in the future.

To be sure, like all states, the Chinese communist state concealed and continues to hide many of its secrets. My point is rather that minorities and other marginal groups in China, and indeed everyone, have had no freedom not to open their eyes to see what the state wants them to see; their travel to the political centre and other parts of China is a political obligation. Seeing was and remains, thus, a central part of the Chinese socialist state-building, in that it aims to effect the citizen-cum-subjects' centripetalist embrace of the Chinese state and nation.

Mutual Visits and Hospitality

In spring 1950, only several months after the PRC was proclaimed, the Chinese government, at Mao Zedong's initiative, began to dispatch central delegations to visit minority regions. Between July 1950 and the end of 1952, the government sent four goodwill missions (中央访问团, *zhong-yang fangwentuan*) to the ethnic minority regions of the Southwest, the Northwest, the Centre-South, and the Northeast and Inner Mongolia, respectively. The delegation to the Southwest visited minorities in Xikang, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces from July 1950 for

seven months. The North-western delegation set off in August 1950, visiting Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang. The Central-southern delegation went to Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hunan in June 1951 for a period of three months, and the North-eastern and Inner Mongolian delegation visited Inner Mongolia, Suiyuan (now part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region), and North-eastern provinces from July 1952 for two months (Wang et al. 2008: 290–294).

Led by high-ranking ethnic minority cadres or famous non-communist, but pro-communist leaders and scholars, these missions relayed greetings from Mao and the Central People's Government to the minorities, apologized to them for the past wrongs wrought on them by previous Han Chinese regimes, and propagated the CCP's new minority nationality policy. Distributing gift items that were locally difficult to come by, such as salt and medicine, they visited minority leaders and representatives, and held numerous discussion meetings and parties, all with the aim of overcoming mutual distrust and securing minority confidence in the new state. They showed films about the new China including a documentary about the PRC founding ceremony, and they distributed portraits of the first chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP, or the "sovereign" of the new China, Mao Zedong, in order to let the frontier people see who their new national leader was (Wang et al. 2008: 293).

One of the delegations' missions was to invite the top minority leaders to Beijing, following a directive issued by the Chinese government in August 1950 to select representative figures from among the minority upper echelons and to send them to Beijing to participate in the first National Day celebration on 1 October 1950 and the May Day celebration the following year. These were the first two national holidays to be marked at all administrative levels, with large scale parades held in the capital, provincial centres and large cities simultaneously, enacting the newly imagined state's "homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson 1991: 25). From this first celebration in October 1950 until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, almost all ethnic minority leaders of various ranks made trips to either regional cities or Beijing, or both. A new tradition of what may be called "political tourism" began, engulfing all the ethnic minorities soon to be officially classified and recognised as minority nationalities (少数民族, *shaoshu minzu*) (cf. Mullaney 2011).

In Beijing, during the May Day and/ or National Day celebrations, these minority elite visitors did not walk in the parades to be inspected

by Chinese leaders; instead, they were invited to stand alongside Chinese leaders on the Tiananmen rostrum, or on the viewing stand to the right of the rostrum, and inspect the parades or the mass pageant. They were accorded the same protocol used for foreign dignitaries invited for the same events. On these occasions, it was the Chinese and the newly disciplined citizens of the new China who became the objects of inspection in the newly built “human zoo” on Tiananmen Square (Blanchard et al. 2008; Wu 2005).

Visiting the Chinese centre and participating in the national political rituals was only the start of minority elite political tourism. After the festival, they would be taken to other parts of China to see what is called “the motherland’s beautiful mountains and rivers” (祖国的大好河山, *zǔguo de dabao heshan*), and visit model factories or agricultural villages, and other exemplary places. Among the tourist dignitaries were Tibet’s highest leaders. In October 1954, after attending the first National People’s Congress, at which they were elected as vice-chairman of the National People’s Congress and standing committee member, respectively, the youthful 14th Dalai Lama and the 10th Panchen Lama left Beijing to spend about seven months visiting Nanjing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenyang, Harbin, Fushun, Inner Mongolia, and Yanbian on a tour of almost the whole of China, apart from Xinjiang and Taiwan, before returning to Tibet the following May (Goldstein 2007: chapters 19–21; Li 1996).

Political Tourism and the Chinese State Tradition

As this case shows, travel and sightseeing played an important role in the Chinese Communist Party’s attempt to win over and transform ethnic minority leaders. To be sure, by the beginning of the 1950s, ethnic minorities posed no credible danger to the new regime; in fact, they had all been incorporated into the new China. They had all been kept under the watchful eyes of the regime, or the new state had already “seen” them. What then would be the necessity for indulging these marginal and defeated groups with the expenditure of extravagant amounts of money and energy; extravagant because this massive sightseeing operation was carried out in the early years of the PRC when it was a poor state in the middle of a costly war in Korea? Why did the new Chinese state choose to carry out this seemingly uneconomical undertaking, and how did they rationalise it?

It may strike one that this undertaking is reminiscent of the traditional Chinese tributary system, wherein the emperor was largely immobile and the peripheral lords had to visit the court to have an audience with the emperor. This system was extensively instituted and ritualized during the Manchu Qing dynasty, especially in relation to non-Chinese groups, such as the Mongols, Tibetans, and Muslims (Fairbank and Têng 1941; Lin 2009). Mongol princes, for instance, would have to visit the capital through the annual shift system (年班, *nianban*), and the purpose of such visits was to solidify their bond with China, inculcating a centripetalizing (向心, *xiangxin*) devotion to the emperor by the princes. It was predicated on a conviction that distance from the centre might not only loosen the relationship, but also allow a separate or even an alternative political centre to develop, which would have a disastrous effect on imperial rule.

Central to these tributary visits was seeing, or rather mutual seeing, that is, for the emperor to “see” his subjects, and for the subjects to see the “dragon face” (龙颜, *longyan*), as it were, of the emperor (覲见, *jìnjian*). The tribute-bearing mission’s procession into the imperial court, that is, the Forbidden City, and the audience with the emperor were pompously ritualized and designed to inspire awe (威, *wei*). We are familiar with the controversy surrounding the audience that the first British envoy to the Qing dynasty, Lord Macartney, had with Emperor Qianlong, in which Lord Macartney refused to *kowtow* to the emperor (Hevia 1995). The Qing state looked like Clifford Geertz’s (1981) “theatre state” *par excellence*. What stands out to characterize the Manchu Qing theatre state is that it had to keep up an appearance, to strike a delicate balance of awe (威, *wei*) and benevolence (恩, *en*) or virtue (德, *de*). I will come back to such characteristics later when discussing the socialist Chinese state.

This tributary visitation tradition continued into the early Republican period, though it was used primarily to keep the Mongol princes from pursuing independence. The new Chinese Nationalist regime established in Nanjing in 1928 was initially scornful of any ritual elegance. Indeed, the frontier peoples were deemed a minor irritation until the regime realised that the Mongols in Inner Mongolia were aspiring to build their own nation-states with the help of the Japanese. It was not until the 1930s, in the wake of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and the Inner Mongolian movement for high-degree autonomy, that the Chinese Nationalist government tried to combat what they called cen-

trifugal (离心, *lixin*) tendencies by reinstating the imperial tributary visitation system with the Mongols, Tibetans and Muslims. It was decreed that the frontier princes should make annual visits to the new Chinese capital, Nanjing, lasting one month from 21 December to 21 January the following year, during which they would be led to meet with various central leaders, *koutow* to the portrait of the founder of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yatsen (Sun Yixian), and finally have an audience with Chiang Kaishek (Jiang Jieshe), the then paramount Chinese leader. It was also decided to build reception centres (招待所, *zhaodaisuo*) to accommodate the increasing numbers of frontier ethnic people and to attract them to work for the Chinese government (Huang 1938: 464–465; cf. Mengzang Weiyuanhui Bianyishi 1971). This “sub-imperial” initiative, however, did not take off, largely due to the Japanese invasion of China proper in 1937 when the Chinese government moved the capital to Chongqing in Sichuan province.

We nevertheless get a rare insight into the rationale for this new travel imperative from a proposal to Liu Wenhui, a Sichuanese warlord, made in 1934 by Ren Naiqiang (1934), a famous Chinese ethnologist specializing in southwestern frontier issues. In this proposal, based on his investigations of Tibetans in the Xikang region of Sichuan, Ren specifically suggested “sightseeing” (观光, *guan guang*) as one of the most effective ways to promote the assimilation of barbarians (蕃人, *fanren*), that is, Tibetans, into the Han Chinese. Drawing a contrast between the attitudes of those who had seen interior China and those who had not, he wrote that those who had been to China proper and had had long-term dealings with the Chinese were politically submissive to China, whereas those who had little knowledge of China were arrogant to the extreme. He alleged that, living in isolation, the frontier people were “like frogs in a well”, seeing the small sky as the whole world under heaven.

When they were told about the great size of China and the large population of the Han Chinese people by those barbarians who had visited Nanjing and Shanghai, they roared with laughter dismissing it as a lie (Ren 1934: 232).

Convinced that their disrespect for China came out of their ignorance, Ren suggested three ways to “entice the barbarians to enter and tour Sichuan”.

The first way was to encourage “barbarian” traders to come to trade tax free in Chengdu, the provincial capital, where they would be provided with good housing facilities and interpreters. They would return and

“propagate the awe and virtue” of the Chinese and their words would be taken seriously, given the high status enjoyed by traders among “barbarians”. The second was for the Sichuan provincial military department to set up a school, ordering each county to send more than four children from families of “barbarian headmen” to study Chinese language and to learn knowledge about China taught in Tibetan. The teaching would last three to four hours a day, and the rest of the day would be spent visiting military camps, factories, streets and other “great places”. Again, Ren suggested that they would be likely to go back and say nice things about China, and their words would be convincing because of their high status of nobility. The third was not to execute captured “barbarian rebels” as had usually been the case. Instead, the more powerful rebels should be taken to Chengdu for disciplining. He argued that they would not rebel again upon release, and their experiences in Chinese prison would be a warning to others. The only problem he detected was that the “barbarians” dreaded the hot weather in Chengdu, believing that they would die if they came. The real reason, he argued, was smallpox, to which many barbarians were not immunized. So he suggested setting up a smallpox immunization clinic for would-be Tibetan travellers. He was convinced that with political pressure applied, they would not refuse to come (Ren 1934: 232–233).

There is no evidence that Ren Naiqiang’s proposal was implemented in any systematic way, for Sichuan was soon swamped by refugees from eastern China. The overwhelming concern during the Sino-Japanese war was not so much bringing the barbarians down from remote mountains as how to get into this south-western frontier area, which was now deemed China’s sanctuary (cf. Bulag 2002). Chinese refugee intellectuals fleeing Japanese invasions now set out to investigate the minority peoples in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, producing a large amount of first-hand ethnographies and travel writings, which laid the foundation for the PRC’s ethnic classification project initiated in the early 1950s, which ultimately expanded the number of official ethnic groups in China from five to 56, including the dominant Han (Fiskesjö 2012).

However, the reasoning in Ren’s proposal for minority sightseeing was instructive and compelling. Sightseeing was not intended as leisure, but largely for political integration and cultural assimilation of the frontier peoples into the new Chinese state. By Ren’s reasoning, the frontier people’s resistance to integration, was not so much a political quest for

maintaining a separate polity for themselves, but purely the result of their ignorance of what China was like. Their alleged belligerent bigotry was attributed to geographical isolation, and the only way out of it was for the frontier people to see with their own eyes what China looked like.

There is some similarity between Ren's reasoning and the Chinese imperial practice of tributary visitation, that is, the belief that political defiance and even challenge of authority was caused by distance from the centre. Indeed, both are based on the tradition of *wufu* (五服), the five concentric zones of submission, a political schema developed in the ancient Chinese classic *Yugong* (禹贡). In this schema, people are administered by the king in five concentric zones according to their geographical distance from the capital. At every 250 kilometres removed from the capital, their duty and tribute to the centre proportionately decreases. In the last and remotest zone, the king would have no control over the people there, who were deemed as wild as animals. Thus, the imperative of the classical Chinese state was to bring the distance closer to the centre or the self, thereby to civilize or humanize the people there, by making them perform better services and offer better tributes. Conversely, moving away from the centre would not only imply a loss of control, but more importantly cast a gibe at the virtue of the emperor or king, hence the imperative of "cherishing men from afar" (怀柔远人, *huairou yuannren*).

By the 1930s, the men from afar, now located on the national border, could no longer be safely ignored, even if they did not create much trouble. For what was at stake now, was the legitimacy of the new Chinese nation; the isolation and remoteness of the borderland peoples were understood to be factors in those people's non- or mis-recognition of the new Chinese nation, of which they were now deemed a part, and this had major consequences for the nation's own consummation. These men from afar were now to be brought out of their "isolation" or James Scott's "Zomia" (cf. Scott 2009), as it were, to "see" the new China with their own eyes, and thereby to identify with the new nation and its political centre, and to perform the necessary ritual service.

The key question for this paper then is as much about how the Chinese state saw the minorities or the marginals, as about how the new state showed itself to its would-be citizens, how it tried to ensure that the minorities and marginals saw the state in the way it wanted them to see it. Once we put the question this way, we can now explore how the Chinese state wanted to make itself "legible" (cf. Scott 1998) to the borderland people.

Seeing Like a Minority

It is important to note that, in the post-1949 political tourism, the invitees were not ordinary people, but so-called “representative figures of the upper echelon”, meaning non-communist elites. Among the Yi people in Xikang province (1939–1955), for instance, the invitees were mostly aristocratic Black Yi. The extensive profiles kept in the Sichuan Provincial Archive show that when the Yi delegates were selected by the local government, their background and rank were meticulously checked. The most important quality for selection was *fushe li* (辐射力) or “radiating power”, which was measured by the number of people under their control or they could influence. The potential delegates’ attitudes to the Chinese and the CCP were also investigated, though hostile attitudes would not exclude them from being invited. In fact, the more powerful or the more hostile they were, the greater the chances of being invited to Beijing, and in special instances, they were even allowed to keep their body guards. This selection criterion appeared to have been applied widely, as shown in the profiles of Tibetan visitors in the Gansu Provincial Archive, which I consulted in summer 2011, and recent oral history materials published in China.

Treating these traditional and somewhat hostile elites with courtesy may seem surprising, given the CCP’s class-based approach. From 1950 to 1953, China carried out land reform to redistribute land confiscated from landlords to landless peasants. In the campaign, landlords in inland China became the objects of CCP-orchestrated popular justice; they were denounced, dispossessed, and in many cases executed. As many as five million landlords were reportedly killed during this period. On the frontiers, however, the CCP took a less radical approach. In the first few years of the new administration, for instance, traditional elites were co-opted into the government and offered high administrative posts. Given their control of their subjects, and given their geographical location living along borders, their loyalty to the new regime was understandably consequential to the political stability of the frontier.

Not all minority leaders were thrilled at the invitation to become part of the CCP administration, however. In fact, many went into hiding, or even crossed borders into neighbouring countries because they were concerned that the Chinese communists were out to capture them. Some Black Yi aristocrats were particularly suspicious of the Chinese motives and for good reason. Historically, Black Yi often came down from the Liangshan Mountains to kidnap Chinese from lowland Chinese villages

and turn them into slaves. Thus, in one instance, according to a senior Yi man in Liangshan, whom I interviewed in 2010, the protracted travel of a Black Yi leader in inland China caused tremendous anxiety among his subordinates, who, fearing that the Chinese might have kidnapped him, attempted a rescue operation. The Dalai Lama's Kashag (governing council) officials also anguished over whether or not to allow the Dalai Lama to go to Beijing after he was invited (Goldstein 2007: 487). In addition to fearing that his visit might give legitimacy to the Chinese claim over Tibet, they were also worried about the Dalai Lama's personal and psychological safety.

These fears for personal safety were unwarranted as, in fact, the minority delegates were accorded the utmost courtesy and hospitality. To host the minority leaders, special nationality reception houses or hostels (民族招待所, *minzu zhaodaisuo*) were built in provincial capitals or large cities, equipped with ethnic amenities and interpreters. At every stop of their journey to Beijing and beyond, the minority visitors were met and seen off by the highest-ranking local officials at bus or train stations personally, and they were entertained at sumptuous banquets.

But the ethnic minority delegates and their councils may have had good reason to worry about their mental or psychological safety, for the chief purpose of their travel was indeed to influence their sympathies towards the new China by impressing them through the twin acts of according them the highest honour and also showing them around to see for themselves the "beautiful mountains and rivers of the motherland".

On their visits to regions outside Beijing, they would visit three types of place: first, large modern factories that showcased China's technological advancement; second, military facilities, such as military airports and warships, that demonstrated China's military prowess; and third, scenic places, such as rivers, gardens, and urban centres, where they could relax and enjoy local hospitality.

Paul Hollander (1998), in his pioneering study of what he called "political pilgrimages" made by leftist Western scholars or politicians to communist countries such as the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, noted the special hospitality received by foreign visitors. They were treated with the utmost of respect, shown the best tourist sites, and given the best food. But they did not appear to have any freedom, as they were not allowed to see what they wanted to see. In fact, few visitors had the audacity to make alternate requests; instead they behaved like good guests and were content with what they had been shown. Most interestingly,

many such visitors became spokespersons for those communist regimes; they wrote of their experiences in a positive light, taking what they saw as a normal part of communist society: the people there were extremely hospitable, all smiling, all happy, and all enjoying wonderful food.

We can detect a similar logic in the Chinese operation of minority political tourism. However, unlike the treatment of Western visitors, who would not be explicitly told what to write about China, minority leaders' impressions were deliberately shaped and scripted by the regime.

A controversy over the Dalai Lama's reception in Chengdu in 1955 is particularly indicative of the hospitality management of the CCP. In 1954, on his way to Beijing, the Dalai Lama stopped over in Chengdu, the most important Chinese cultural, economic and military outpost in southwest China. He was given a royal welcome, with red carpets laid down and all the provincial party, government, and military officials and officers lining up to meet him and his entourage. On his return via the same route in May 1955, Li Jingquan, the provincial party secretary, decided not to go to the railway station to meet him again, but instead sent other leaders, thinking that he had already met the Dalai Lama on the previous visit and he was too busy to do it again. He sent an apology claiming that he was sick, but unfortunately for him, the next day's *Sichuan Daily* reported him attending another official function. After his interpreter told him about the newspaper report, the Dalai Lama was not amused. Several days later, Premier Zhou Enlai stopped off in Chengdu on his way back to Beijing from the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. When both Li and the Dalai Lama went to the airport to meet the premier, Zhou ignored Li and stepped forward to warmly shake hands with the young Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama was flattered and thought highly of the premier. Zhou later severely criticized Li Jingquan for not understanding the CCP's united front policy, and for not even understanding the Party's own protocol. The Dalai Lama was now no longer just a Tibetan leader, but a vice-chairman of the National People's Congress, that is a "state leader" (国家领导人, *guojia lingdaoren*) and superior in rank to Li Jingquan, who was merely a provincial level party secretary (Goldstein 2007: 523–528).

Prior to each visit, minority leaders would be fed with particular lines of information, and after the visit, they would be organised to have a seminar discussion, not to explore issues from different angles, but to achieve a unified understanding or consensus of what they had seen.

Should one of them have a different, or rather a “wrong” opinion, he or she would be “helped” to understand why they were in the wrong.

Chinese caretakers would closely monitor what the visitors had to say on what they had seen and reported them in their official “internal documents” (内部文件, *neibu wenjian*). In an internal briefing prepared by the Gansu province Gannan minority nationality sightseeing party reception office, dated 11 October 1965, the words of some Tibetan delegates who had visited Lanzhou were recorded as follows:

The Nima small team, upon visiting the Yanguoxia hydroelectric power plant, all started to talk: “At the time of the 1958 rebellion, the native chieftains (土官, *tuguan*) and headmen (头人, *touren*) said that the Communist Party was useless, we could defeat them, or, even if we could not defeat them, they would not be able to cross the Yellow River. Later the Liberation Army came to Maqu. They built a bridge overnight and all the people and horses went over: that got me totally convinced of their power (真叫人服了, *zhen jiao ren fu le*). But someone who had visited Lanzhou earlier came back to tell us that Lanzhou had blocked the Yellow River; I didn’t get it, nor did I believe it. If the Yellow River was really blocked, it could not have been done by humans (meaning that the gods must have done it) [original comment]. This time, having come to visit Lanzhou, I am convinced to my very bones. The Communist Party is really great; Chairman Mao’s leadership is really good (Gansu Sheng Gannan Shaoshu Minzu Canguantu-an Jiedai Bangongshi 1965).

At the end of a tour, minutes would be drafted, which would then be sent to the provincial or prefectural party committee for approval. The minutes were usually filled with lines of how the elite visitors were impressed by Chinese hospitality, how advanced the Chinese regions were, and most importantly how powerful the Chinese were. Upon their return after a long journey, unlike the Western visitors who would hasten to write, of their own volition, and report on their exciting trips, which were denied to most Westerners, the minority visitors would each be given a copy of the minutes and then charged with going back to their villages to make oral reports on what they had seen.

The Chinese stories of political tourism contain a distinct narrative. This is an enframed narrative with several important messages. In the case of minority leaders, the issue was framed in ethnic and moral terms. China, or rather inland China was cast as Han Chinese, but they were a different kind of Han Chinese now. First, the Han Chinese were “good” people, who now treated the minorities well, as evidenced by all the hos-

pitality and courtesy accorded to them, in contradistinction to the Nationalist Chinese who had been “bad” to them. Second, this Han communist China was a powerful one, more powerful than the Han Nationalist China, whose eight million troops had been annihilated, and even more powerful than the Japanese, who had been driven out of China, or the Americans whose invasion of North Korea had been successfully repelled by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), or so they were led to believe. Third, China was a huge country geographically with a mammoth population.

The latter two narrative points were to challenge the old view of some minority leaders, especially the Yi and Tibetan leaders, that the land under their control was the largest under heaven and they could defeat anyone. A popular joke at the time about a Black Yi lineage chief called Ahou tells that, when Ahou heard that the Americans had invaded North Korea, he told the PLA to lead the Americans to the Yi’s Liangshan mountains for them to fight, for he believed that he could beat the Americans in the same way that the Yi had enslaved two American pilots in the 1930s when their plane had crashed in Liangshan.

From these narratives, we can see that the early Chinese communist state was little different from the late imperial Manchu Qing state or the Chinese Nationalist state; both were impelled to inspire awe and propagate virtue towards the people at the margins of the state.

One could of course wonder why the PLA didn’t simply move in and grab the minority regions, given their overwhelming military superiority, having defeated the Nationalist’s eight-million-strong army. Since the eighteenth century, conquest, according to Anthony Pagden (2006), has become a negative concept in Europe. In China, I suggest that it is a similarly negative term appropriated by the CCP to denounce its enemies, such as the Japanese and the KMT. Its preferred term is “liberation”, a concept that has allowed the CCP to achieve what conquest could not. The CCP theology of liberation needs a strategy and a distinct ethnic narrative. Bringing non-communist minority leaders to Beijing or the Chinese regional centres constitutes the core of the Party’s “nationality work” (民族工作, *minzu gongzuo*), which is different from “nationality affairs” (民族事务, *minzu shiwu*). Nationality work is part of the Party’s united front policy, a strategic operation to win friends and supporters, and neutralise opposition; its targets are usually enemies or opposition leaders. Nationality affairs, by contrast, deal with normal minority issues within the CCP administrative control.

An integral part of the CCP's nationality work, political tourism aims to cultivate minority centripetalism to China. It is intended as "Discover China" trips, to make the minority leaders become intimate with and to enjoy what Slavaj Žižek (1990; see also Ivy 1995) would call the "National Thing", a new national body to be seen and desired by the internal others.

Here is the economic rationale for such an extravagant operation of political tourism. This rationale is tied to a moral system and a political calculation of "washing hearts and minds" (洗心, *xixin*; *xin* (心) literally means "heart", but in Chinese philosophy, it denotes both heart and mind). Washing hearts and minds is a traditional Chinese technique of transforming and reintegrating criminals into society. Successfully washing the hearts and minds of just a few of the most powerful, most stubborn opponents of the regime would be a victory greater than defeating an entire army. This is not just because of the perverse satisfaction that could be derived from the process; nor is the "washed" minority chief a man whose will has been broken and who is no longer a threat; rather, with his heart and mind washed or transformed, he is expected to exercise new agency by not only being loyal to the regime, but also serving as a model for others to follow. In this logic, with his influence among his subordinates still remaining, this chief could be charged with the mission of washing the hearts and minds of his subordinates, thereby sparing the new state the expenditure of its precious energy, which could be saved for "building socialism".

Seeing and the CCP Struggle for Recognition

The CCP political tourism, as discussed above, was in part informed by the CCP's understanding of the minority condition on the frontier: they went into hiding and were distrustful of the Han Chinese in general due to KMT oppression, and some minority leaders were arrogant, thinking that they were more powerful than the Han, and this was attributed to their alleged lack of knowledge of the Chinese. Thus the CCP felt it was imperative to change the minority perception of the Han Chinese, and this they thought could be achieved best by inviting the minority leaders to come to "see with their own eyes" (亲眼, *qinyan*) that the new Han Chinese were "good" and were qualitatively different from the "bad" old KMT Han (cf. Bulag 2012), and also that they were more powerful. It was to achieve the twin goals of both eliminating their old fears about

the Chinese who had turned good, and inculcating a new fear of the good, but more powerful Chinese. This was the CCP's struggle for recognition: to make minorities recognize the CCP and the "good" Han's virtue and superiority.

What we have identified here is, thus, a different kind of recognition struggle than the one we are familiar with. It was not so much a minority people's struggle to be recognized by the state and to legitimize their survival, as the Chinese state's struggle to be recognized as legitimate and important in the eyes of the minorities. The new Chinese state tried to present a legible self to the minorities. The minority political tourism was shaped as a tool precisely for the purpose of making the new Chinese state "recognizable".

This Chinese political tourism operates on a principle different from that on which conventional national tourism is operated. In the latter, tourists, although taken to specific sites/ sights that are carefully designed to exhibit the nation or its "fragments", are nevertheless free to see or not to see, and to decide what to see. In the Chinese political tourism, the subjects (the people doing the viewing) do not have freedom not to see, nor do they have much freedom in deciding how to understand what they have seen. Indeed, the Chinese state decides what they should see, for their tour is organized, and their understanding is shaped by individual and collective discussions, where a consensus is enforced. The Chinese and the Chinese state are not something obvious to the viewers' eyes; they are an abstraction, whose understanding requires sustained, rather than casual, effort and education.

And precisely because of the Chinese state's complexity or abstraction, getting others to see its complexion in the correct manner has been a struggle fraught with frustrations for the Chinese. First, political tourism is a huge economic burden to the regime, for all the costs are borne by the government. Second, some of the leaders who go on the trips follow their own cultural logic, having little understanding of the state or knowledge of the outside world. A hilarious joke circulating in Liangshan, which I recorded in summer 2010, nicely illustrates this point, and which I present at length below:

In 1951–1952, two Black Yi chiefs, Ahoulumuzi and Guojimuguo, were invited to visit Beijing. They were at first reluctant to go, unsure what the Chinese were up to, but they decided to take the risk. They arrived at Xichang city's old gate on horseback and saw Chinese soldiers entering the city on trucks with large red flowers on their chests. They marvelled at the trucks, saying, "What a big Chinese *'tie muba'*

(iron horse)!” After the soldiers went through the gate, they were met by officials who came with a black Volga car. When they saw the small “iron horse”, they were displeased, thinking that the Chinese were trying to humiliate them. How could they, two Black Yi chieftains, sit in such a small black box! They wanted to ride on a truck, but the officials told them that the car was actually a more prestigious vehicle. Thinking that the Chinese were deliberately trying to cheat them, the two chieftains feigned stomach pain. When asked what the matter was, they said through an interpreter that they would go only if they were given a truck. The officials had no choice but to find a truck for them. As soon as they saw the truck, they said that their stomach aches had gone. They then climbed onto the open truck, putting on their sheep wool cloaks and sitting with the hero pole on their headdress pointing proudly to the sky.

On their way, however, the vehicle had to climb up through a mountain range, and it became very cold. By the time they got to Ya’an, the capital of Xikang province, they were agonizingly cold. They were met by the provincial officials who came in small Volgas, and belatedly realized that, actually, high ranking Chinese did not ride “big horses”. They then took the car to Chongqing, and from there, they took a train, which they had never seen before. They called it a dragon *tobu* (Yi: wooden wagon). From Chongqing, they sent a letter back home, telling their people that the Chinese were powerful and that they should try to negotiate, rather than fight the Chinese, as they were impressed and frightened by all the canon bombs, tanks, guns and other modern things that they had never seen before.

In Beijing, they were treated extremely well. Before their return, Premier Zhou Enlai gave them lots of gifts, but they were not happy, saying in private that the Chinese were cunning: they gave us this and that, but they did not give the most important thing. When the interpreter asked them what they wanted, they said they would have liked to have the *yemingzhu* (夜明珠, luminous pearls), that is, light bulbs. The interpreter told them that they would be useless in Liangshan without a power plant. They refused to believe this, saying that the Chinese were lying again. Zhou then gave them a box of bulbs which they took to Liangshan. As soon as they got home, they held a meeting of chieftains, inviting everyone to see the “the Chinese luminous pearls” which they had hung on lines, just as they were done in Beijing and elsewhere. When people arrived at the appointed time, none of the bulbs lighted up. They sighed, thinking that they had been once again cheated by the Chinese.

There is no point in trying to verify whether or not the two chieftains were as naive or as foolish as the story suggests; nor did the Yi person who told the story try to prove otherwise. Today, although the Yi are no longer isolated and perform as well as any other groups, in the Chinese civilizational economy of wisdom, they and other minorities continue to be thought as ignorant or gullible. That people still remember the joke and keep telling it today is, I suggest, because the joke contains a counter-message, that is, the Yi may not be as smart as the Han Chinese, but it is incumbent on the Chinese to treat the Yi as equal citizens with honesty and sincerity. It is a subtle criticism of the disguised instrumentalism in China's generous political tourism for ethnic minorities, a criticism that remains highly relevant for today.

A third frustration was the fact that the Chinese did not have absolute control over the way that others perceived the new state. In the 1950s, some minority leaders had prior knowledge of China; some in fact had travelled extensively in Nanjing and Shanghai before the CCP takeover of power. Sometimes, they were unimpressed by the CCP management of the cities, commenting that they were no longer as prosperous as during the KMT rule. In such instances, they would be corrected by the Chinese caretakers or tour guides, who would explain that although Shanghai was more bustling in the past, it was only for a few rich people and foreigners who enjoyed all the privilege; now that the city belonged to the people, it was enjoyed by the great masses. Furthermore, the hitherto endemic social problems of begging and prostitution were no more, and this too proved the greatness of the new China, under the great leadership of Chairman Mao and the CCP.

A senior Mongol cadre I interviewed in summer 2012 recalled a political joke about Wang Yuefeng, a Mongol aristocrat co-opted by the CCP to become the governor of the Yekejuu League of Inner Mongolia from 1954 to 1965 as part of the CCP united front operation. Wang had been to Yan'an and had met Mao in the 1940s. After his tourist trip to Beijing in the mid-1950s, he told a packed audience in the League government auditorium that he was very much impressed by Mao and believed that he was a genuine capitalist because he had become so much fatter since their last meeting. The audience tittered with nervous laughter at this apparent *faux-pas*. And, although he was forgiven on that occasion on account of his high-ranking non-Party minority leader status, he was ultimately punished ten years later during the Cultural Revolution for making that fateful remark which was deemed to be insulting to the

Great Leader. My informant was not clear whether this mishap was a slip of the tongue because Wang was confused about the terminology: capitalism and communism (Wang apparently did not read Chinese well, despite having a Chinese name) or because he had made the comment intentionally. Regardless, what is unmistakable is that the CCP did not have full control over what impression they would leave upon their invited guests.

As mentioned, the 1950s were violent years in inland China; Chinese landlords were subject to violence and many were killed outright. Although the sites of land reform or class struggle sessions in Chinese villages were not a part of the minority political tourism, it would be hard for the minority tourists not to notice the violence that was taking place in the country during their tours. Indeed, while some were deeply impressed and convinced of China's superiority, others were equally terrified, realizing, acutely and correctly, that should the socialist land reform be introduced into their own area, they would, like the Chinese landlords, also be struggled against and perhaps killed. They knew very well that they were the targets of the so-called "democratic reform", the minority version of land reform, even though the CCP leadership had promised its introduction via a gradual procedure based on consultation.

Minority banditry in the frontier was rampant in the early 1950s. In 1956, a large-scale rebellion broke out among the Yi in Sichuan and Yunnan (Pan 1997), triggering similar rebellions among Tibetans in Sichuan's Kam region. The turmoil in Sichuan, in turn, led to the Tibetan uprising and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. All of these rebellions were led by none other than the former guests of the Chinese government who had toured the greater part of China, having seen the motherland's beautiful mountains and rivers!

The case of Su Yonghe is symptomatic of what the Chinese political tourism ultimately entailed. A powerful Tibetan chieftain in the Heishui region of Sichuan province, Su waged two large rebellions against the Chinese army: in 1951–1952 and in 1956. After he surrendered following the first round of rebellion, he was immediately sent out on a touristic mission in inland China, including Beijing, as is shown in the following oral history from Lin Xiangrong, an interpreter closely involved in the political touristic operations in the 1950s, recounted to anthropology graduate students Zhang Yuan and others in 2006:

Lin: At that time, Su Yonghe went into hiding in the forest, but on the side of the Central Government, the People's Liberation Army

knew where he was hiding. The Central Government repeatedly instructed (the army) not to capture him, but to let him come out and surrender on his own volition. Consequently, he did come out and surrender. When he came out, he went to Mawo, and he asked that chairman Tianbao and Suo Guanying personally come to pick him up. He was scared; chairman Tianbao and Suo Guanying went to meet him personally. Taking him back, they immediately asked him to go on an inspection trip (参观, *canguan*). Oh dear, many cadres could not understand. He came to Luhua, and people had to line up in long lines to welcome him, as if he was a man of huge merit; we welcomed him despite his rebellion. As soon as he came back, he was sent out to *canguan*; he went to visit Chongqing, Chengdu, and later even Beijing and Korea.

Yang: What did he *canguan*?

Lin: He was asked to *canguan* to educate him.

Zhang: Letting him *canguan* was to educate him.

Lin: Of course, it was to educate him, to make him see how powerful the PLA were, to make him realize that his Heishui region was nothing (让他晓得你黑水算啥吗, *rang ta xiaode ni heishui suan sha ma*).

Zhang: Then, did he go to *canguan* factories, countryside?

Lin: Of course he went to *canguan* factories, especially the battlefields in Korea; that was really scary. He was such a fool; after seeing such a big power, he came back and launched a second rebellion. Don't you think he was reactionary? (laugh) Don't you think he was a real fool! (Zhang et al. 2008: 116–117).

The rebellions of some of China's most cherished political tourists from afar, thus, imply not so much a total failure of the political tourism as its success in accomplishing the Chinese state's central mission, that is, its struggle for recognition in the eyes of its minority invitees. The latter were certainly profoundly impressed by the Chinese hospitality and magnanimity; but they were not passive tourists whose minds were a blank sheet onto which China could draw its own blueprint at will. Some of the more politically astute observers recognized the obvious disparity between the projected "good Han" image through ritualized hospitality and the state's real intent, in other words: their own political demise as soon as the so-called "democratic reform" was implemented in their own societies. Those who failed to recognize or defied that intent soon met their own end at the hands of their most hospitable hosts.

Conclusion

The state-orchestrated sightseeing operation, which I have called political tourism in this paper, is by no means a bygone tradition of the early socialist era; it has been revived since 1978 and continues to the present day. In the absence of “traditional” elites, minority cadres, often organised along gender or professional lines, are still packed into sightseeing parties (参观团, *cānguāntuán*) to see the modern wonders in China’s coastal cities, as the story in the opening paragraph shows.

In the recent decade or so, as China has “risen” economically and politically in the world, it has been aspiring to redefine its status as a “great state” (大国, *dàguó*). The “great state” for the Chinese is not just about a stellar economic performance, nor about having a bigger say in the world of nations. It is actually a yearning for a return to the old status of “Middle Kingdom” of the world under the revamped scheme of “all under heaven” (天下, *tiānxià*) (Zhao 2005). As *tiānxià* denotes a civilizational centre surrounded by peripheral barbarians, China’s new status can only be consummated by the devotional tribute-bearing from outside China. Similar to the foundational years of the 1950s, when political tourism was a means for consolidating the new regime as documented in this paper, today, in the new millennium, political tourism remains a time-honoured tool for cementing China’s new status, encouraging the world to see China in a new light and to recognize its “greatness”.

Thus, it is not surprising that the touristic programmes have been extended to overseas Chinese students and migrants (Xiang 2003), and the elites of the “overseas Chinese ethnic minorities” (Barabantseva 2010 and 2012). Chinese leaders exhort them to

come back to visit the country often and tell overseas Chinese, students, and their American friends about China’s progress and achievements and relevant policies in a comprehensive and objective manner (Barabantseva 2010: 121).

A great China has now started to ingather its dispersed diaspora.

The new millennium was marked by China launching a Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) which was held in Beijing from 10–12 October 2000, 10 days after Chinese National Day. More than 80 ministers from 44 African countries and several heads of state gathered in Beijing. Such events have proliferated recently, and each involves extensive sightseeing programmes in Beijing and often beyond. For instance, on 19 June 2012, a delegation of 45 African ministers of culture

toured the Palace Museum, the National Museum and the National Grand Theatre. The Chinese media reported that the African delegates were stunned by the beauty, grandeur and above all technical sophistication of the Theatre:

They all spontaneously expressed their gratitude, praising the Chinese Ministry of Culture for organizing this sightseeing event. Jiakasuo [Jean Claude Gakosso, Congolese Culture and Arts Minister] said, “as a great state, one ought to be like China, not only paying attention to economic development, but also paying attention to the comprehensive advancement in the fields of culture, science and technology, and society” (Song and Fan 2012).

These events are more than a simple revival of an old Sino-African friendship that was promoted from the 1950s to the 1970s, which involved inviting well-known African politicians, intellectuals and businessmen to visit China, with the aim of making sure that “they would be favorably disposed towards China” (Ogunsanwo 1974: 31). If the then effort was to win over African countries to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC in competition with its nemesis, the Republic of China on Taiwan, the current political touristic activities are more geared towards establishing a new international order with China as its undisputed centre.

Seeing, thus, remains a central technology in China’s new centripetalism, intending for wider recognition and admiration from beyond China’s borders. Yet, as I have shown, seeing was a field of political struggle and it produced a mixed record of minority submission and rebellion in the 1950s. The challenge for the new Chinese political tour operators is that their invitees are not always total strangers to China and its wonders. Like the 1950s minority political tourists, some of today’s tourists, both domestic and international, may have seen enough of China and already have cast down their eyes.

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