Tourism Development and Cultural Policies in China

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Abstract: As China actively pursues modernization, the tensions among a rigid application of socialism, the conservatism of tradition, and the demands of economic development threaten to destabilize the nation. All three elemental forces have contradictory objectives and the Chinese Communist Party expends significant effort in attempts to reconcile those differences. Tourism has emerged as an effective vehicle for synthesizing some of the differences through its contribution to the modernization process, its utilization of heritage for product development, and its role in meeting some socialist objectives. Tourism in China has thus exerted a centripetal influence, lessening to some extent tensions among the three opposing forces. Keywords: socialism, modernization, heritage tourism.

Introduction

One of the most striking and peculiar features of the intellectual history of 20th century China has been the emergence and persistence of profoundly iconoclastic attitudes towards the cultural heritage of the Chinese past. Despite the success of the Communist revolution in transforming state and society, the relationship of the new order to the traditional historico-cultural legacy remains uncertain and deeply ambiguous (Lin Yu-Sheng 1979).

Like the Chinese cheung nga kau (ivory artifact) in which a series of concentric ivory balls are carved one inside the other, the complexities of tourism development in contemporary China enclose one era after another and may only be understood by delving back into the past. A unifying theme throughout China’s long history of tourism is the place of culture and the traditions of heritage tourism and pilgrimage.
Where this theme was central during the four millennia covering the reigns of the dynastic emperors from 2000 BC to 1900 AD, it virtually disappeared during the 20th century as a series of upheavals wracked the country. The declaration of a Republic in 1912 broke the linkage with annual imperial pilgrimages. Subsequent internal unrest, up to the time of the civil war between the forces of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong and the Kuomintang regime of Chiang Kai Shek in the latter half of the 40s, prevented most recreational travel. Then, for the three and a half decades of Mao Zedong's regime, both traditional culture and freedom to travel were suppressed, often ruthlessly, as Mao pursued his vision of "totalistic iconoclasm" (Lin 1979:1).

Only with the advent of Deng Xiaoping's "open door" policies of 1978 were these trends reversed. Tourism then became acceptable because of its capacity to make a contribution to modernization. Paradoxically, the conservation and presentation of traditional culture was also approved because of its perceived contribution to enhance national unity and to develop the country's tourism product. However, contradictions remain between the differing objectives of the forces of socialism, modernization, globalization and traditional culture as the Chinese economy powers its way towards the year 2000. In this context, it is suggested that contemporary tourism development and cultural policy in China, particularly as manifested through heritage and the preservation of ethnic minority cultures, is proving an effective vehicle for reconciling to some extent those differing objectives.

This paper analyzes the tensions generated between the Chinese government's determination to maintain political stability under the Communist Party and attempts to find the appropriate mix of traditional Chinese culture, socialist culture, and "modern" culture (the latter necessarily incorporating western values and systems), with reference to developments in tourism. It focuses more on the dynamics of the centripetal and centrifugal internal forces exerted between socialist ideology and traditional culture rather than modernity and exogenous global forces, although tourism must be seen as a significant force for modernization.

To reach an understanding of the complex linkages between these different elements, the paper explores the concept of globalization and China's tourism development. It provides background on historical antecedents for travel in China. A number of policy areas during Mao's regime are examined: education, the social sciences, and their relationship to heritage; "non" tourism; and the collectivization of handicrafts. The changes wrought by Deng's "open door" policies of 1978 including implications for tourism and heritage (Chinese Government 1982); policy towards the ethnic minorities, and the environment are then reviewed. Tourism policies from 1949 to 1995 are briefly surveyed and the roles of heritage and culture in China's contemporary tourism product are explored. Finally two theme parks designed to "showcase" elements of China's current policies towards culture and heritage are examined in some detail. In the context of this paper, heritage tourism is broadly defined and is taken to mean the presentation to visitors of history, culture, buildings
and monuments, sites of important past events, traditional landscapes, the arts (literature, music, dance), traditional events and festivals, and traditional lifestyles.

INTERNAL POLITICIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

The interface between politically driven goals of power and government, the preservation of a nation’s cultural heritage, sustainable environmental values, and tourism development are problematic for many countries. In the People’s Republic of China (PRC) these issues are fundamental not only to the place of tradition in a society which is modernizing its economy at a rapid rate, but they also present very real challenges to the legitimacy of the government. A primary cornerstone of the ideology propounded by the CCP since its inception in 1921 concerned the need to reject the cultural past as a whole and its replacement with a new Chinese socialist culture. Under this policy, massive destruction of China’s rich and varied built heritage occurred and there were sustained attacks on its cultural (living) heritage.

This totalistic iconoclasm, however, is at odds with the contemporary embrace of heritage as perhaps the major element of China’s burgeoning tourism product. Because of its ideological sensitivity, the approach to heritage in its many forms has tended to be carefully controlled by the state; and its use for tourism has often been driven by ideological tenets of politics (in this case, socialism as defined by the Chinese government). Yet in spite of the ambivalence and complexities which can be discerned in the attitude of the CCP to the past, tourism and its use of heritage continues to expand as the policies of the current leadership of China distance the CCP from its founding roots.

The politicization of a nation’s heritage is not new, as states everywhere may try to define or redefine culture to serve national ends. This process of revisionism usually has the objective of reinforcing a national identity or the values espoused by the government of the time—for example, Singapore (Leong 1989); Israel (Trigger 1984); the Soviet Union and other East European countries (Buckley and Witt 1990); Albania and North Korea (Hall 1990); Tanzania (Curry 1990). Few other countries have found the need to assume such comprehensive control of cultural values as China. This is because the CCP took on the daunting task of engineering a major change of the political, social, and cultural values of a civilization which had inculcated enduring features in these areas over a period of some 5000 years (Baum 1975; Hsiung 1970; Lin 1979; Mao 1954; Meisner 1986; Ogden 1992). Cultural values as defined by the CCP have been critical determinants in all areas of life in China since its assumption of government in 1949, from the content of education to the role of intellectuals; from the type of person recruited into the CCP to the content of movies, art, plays, operas, radio, and television; and from rectification campaigns and purges to appropriate forms of economic development, including tourism.

Examining cultural policy and tourism in China shows that internal
imperatives are much stronger than external forces. Those external demands have been harnessed for, and in turn influence to a degree, the shape and form of cultural tourism product inside China. However, the “Chineseness” (Ogden 1992) of the situation in the Middle Kingdom, sets the processes of modernization through tourism apart from the global forces which are considered by some to impose significant homogenization and standardization of tourism products on societies—the so-called “global village” concept (Bonniface and Fowler 1993; Crick 1989; Rosenberg and White 1957). The relative unity of China as a single entity over a 4000 year period and its accompanying “Chineseness” (notwithstanding the upheavals associated with imperial wars, Mongol and Manchu invasion, European imperial incursions, “warlordism”, Japanese invasion, civil war, ethnic minorities, Chinese communist extremism, and, most recently, 20th century economic materialism and globalization) has resulted in a cultural resilience which has defied this wide range of both endogenous and exogenous forces for change.

This is not to imply that Chinese culture has remained static over four millennia, but rather that it has retained unique features which have survived in manifold forms. In the current need to resolve the tensions between socialism, modernization, globalization, and traditional culture, cultural elements are finding expression in the way in which the present government has embraced tourism development. This is not to deny that there are tourism products in China which reflect the global culture. The architecture of many of China’s modern hotels owes as much if not more to international trends in skyscraper design and construction than to traditional Chinese aesthetics, for example, even if their entrances are graced with dragons and their foyers lined with pearl shell panels depicting Chinese epics of the past; and a range of entertainment parks in major cities also display “global” characteristics.

In contrast to the causative influences adduced for globalization, other writers such as Bonniface and Fowler (1993) have argued that local forces have been instrumental in much tourism development and that local players have utilized heritage as a means for emphasizing differentiation in tourism product and place. Urry (1990) has viewed the identification of a specific image for tourism (e.g., Britain as heritage tourism, Switzerland as alpine tourism, Thailand for tropical cultural exotica) as a national response to counter the homogeneity of globalization. Local communities, societies, and countries have not necessarily been passive recipients of pressures for global conformity. Chang, Milne, Fallon and Pohlmann have cautioned against trying to draw too strong a distinction between global-local processes. They believe that much tourism development is in fact a mix of both “the exogenous forces of global market demands and multinational corporations, as well as the endogenous powers” of national authorities (1996:285). The isolation imposed during Mao Zedong’s era in simplistic terms left many Chinese ignorant of global trends; and when this factor is coupled with the resilience of Chinese tradition, the result has been a very Chinese response to modernization through tourism development. It is accepted that some external economic and
market forces have intruded into the Chinese environment but that the dynamics of internal processes (historical, political, social, and cultural) have been paramount in shaping and determining the integration of tourism development policy with aspects of China's national policies on culture.

**Chinese Culture through History**

In historical terms, one of the main features of China's domestic tourism lies in the traditions about travel and heritage sites established over a 4000 year period and now firmly entrenched in the Chinese psyche (Sofield and Li 1996). Powerful dynastic emperor-gods stood at the apex of a religious and political hierarchy in which ancestral gods and animistic spirits resided in mountains, rivers, lakes, and other natural features. Stretching in an unbroken chain from the beginnings of the Shang dynasty (ca 1350–1050 BC) to the final demise of the emperors with the fall of the Quing dynasty and the declaration of a Republic in 1912, each successive emperor and his court paid homage to a wide range of gods and goddesses. The sites multiplied over the centuries and as Buddhism became established, even more sacred sites were added. Much ancient travel was thus for pilgrimage, embedded in the beliefs of the god-kings (Sofield and Li 1996).

Under the Zhou dynasty, which supplanted the Shang dynasty in the 11th century BC, Confucianism emerged ca 660 BC as central to the Chinese tradition. From this era evolved the institution of the Mandarins, a scholarly class who assumed a central role in the administration of the state for the emperors. The Confucian ethic implored the Mandarins "to seek ultimate truth from the landscape" (quoted in Petersen 1995) and their creative talents went into poetry, paintings, and calligraphy inspired by these landscapes. The courtier/poet as traveler became a familiar figure throughout China. The works of Li Bai (701–762 AD) and other Tang dynasty poets and artists such as Wang Wei (701–761 AD), despite being suppressed during the years of Mao, have influenced generations of Chinese. They are instantly familiar to millions of Chinese, both in China and overseas. Such philosophical interpretations of China's historical and sacred sites became—and remain today—part of Chinese "common knowledge" (Petersen 1995:143).

In Imperial times, while merchants traveled widely and there were mass migrations of people affected by war and natural disaster, leisure travel was restricted to the elite classes and their entourages. Under Mao leisure travel was prohibited for all but a favored few. Today, however, millions of Chinese visit sites immortalized by their poets and artists. These sites feature in such lists as the State Council's 1988 "State Level Scenic Wonders and Historical Sites"; and a survey undertaken in 1991 by the China Travel Service of the "Top Forty" most favored tourism spots includes Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spots, Shenzhen, which consists of 100 sites built in miniature in 1989, and also the most famous of the sacred mountains, rivers, and other landscapes which are visited by more than 3 million Chinese each year, seeking out a postmodern expression of their traditional images.
When Western tourists look at the Yangtze, they see a river; the Chinese see a poem replete with philosophical ideals. Part of the "common knowledge" of Chineseness is to recognize representations of the picturesque hills of Guilin, the sea of clouds of Wu-shan (Mount Wu), the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River, and the Yellow Crane Terrace pagoda. These images bring spiritual unity even if the people have never visited them; but when they do visit the importance of these images is reinforced (Sofield and Li 1996). This is exemplified by the traditional saying known to the Chinese all around the world: "If you have not been to the Great Wall you are not a full-grown person". Petersen has suggested that Chinese domestic tourism to such places constitutes "a voluntary cultural decision more akin to a pilgrimage to historical, cultural, and political centres" made in order "to validate the poetic knowledge of places such as the gardens of Suzhou" (1995:150). Without having been nurtured in the Chinese cultural milieu, it is difficult for foreign visitors to enter Chinese places with the same experiential understanding. It is inevitable then, that once tourism became an accepted form of economic activity in China after 1978, it almost automatically encompassed and pursued heritage in all its manifestations, from built heritage to cultural festivals to traditional lifestyles. Internal rather than external forces have been predominant in this process.

Socialism, Modernization, and Traditional Culture

The tensions between the variables of socialism, modernization, and traditional culture have resulted in extremes of policy and upheaval in China for 45 years. It was the socialist values of Marxist-Leninism and totalistic iconoclasm that Mao attempted to impose on China in 1949. Almost immediately the CCP government was confronted with conflicting tensions generated by their desire to introduce a more egalitarian society through socialism, their desire to modernize rapidly, and their need to rebuild China's sense of national identity. Paradoxically, the rigidity of socialist ideology was their greatest obstacle to modernization, while traditional culture was the single greatest obstacle to socialism. As Ogden (1992) noted, socialist culture in China validates a system based on the philosophies of Marx, Lenin, Mao, and now Deng which arc held to be scientific, democratic, and revolutionary. It criticizes traditional Chinese culture for being unscientific, feudal, antimodern and antisocialist. Yet that traditional culture forms the basis, of course, for the Chineseness necessary for national identity and unity. While socialist ideology proclaims its modernity, it has proved too inflexible to encompass many of the values and needs essential for modernization, as evidenced by the move towards a market economy undertaken by Deng. To the extent that some market forces of supply and demand have had to be accepted to accomplish modernization with tourism as a major component, socialist values have been compromised in a limited way. But outside the economic realm, the appeal of Western models and values has been controlled by the central leadership's concern for protecting the
Communist Party and China’s Chineseness (Ogden 1992:6). Thus, despite the consistent attacks by the state on tradition, it needed tradition and used tradition to pursue national unity.

_Heritage and the Social Sciences in China Under Mao._ In considering the place and role of heritage in tourism in China, it is necessary to trace the control exercised by the CCP over its definition of “legitimate knowledge”. In October 1950, the PRC Ministry of Education issued a manifesto which categorized academic disciplines as either revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. For a discipline to be worthy of retention, it had to be seen to be serving Marxist dogma: a discipline’s role was to provide direction for policy to advance society through its various stages to the ultimate perfection of communism. The linkage between socialist culture and education was comprehensive and complete.

In conformity with this framework, many of the social sciences concerned with heritage, such as archeology, anthropology, history, sociology, and linguistics, as well as psychology and law, were castigated for their bourgeois roots, decadent capitalist origins, and propagation of Western values. During the Cultural Revolution, the study of the past was viewed as reactionary and led to the destruction of some archaeological excavations and the disruption of archaeological publications (Trigger 1984). The Soviet model became the template for China’s academic structure, and ethnology emerged as a distinctive socialist discipline aimed solely at “the study and uplifting of minorities”. Ethnology was viewed as a materialist science which could aid in the construction of socialism (Guldin 1992). Linguists could also take refuge in ethnology so long as they abandoned theoretical linguistics and focused on transcribing the languages of the ethnic minorities in China.

“Redness” (political correctness, with commitment to ideology being a major determinant for appointments, promotion, and prescriptions for development) was in the ascendancy over “expertness” and the social sciences became almost defunct in the general repression of the intelligentsia and academia. From 1969–86, for example, humanities students comprised on average only 6% of the total tertiary student population (Hao 1987). At a time when tourism studies were beginning to find a place in West European and North American universities, China shunned them completely. The Cultural Revolution was a last attempt by Mao to reinvigorate a revolution he believed was dying. It is beyond the scope of this paper to write even a brief account of what McIsner (1986:311) has termed the most complex and contradictory period in China’s long history, where all historical analogies fail. Rarely has any society revealed itself so openly, with all its contradictions, scars, and disfigurations and rarely have events unfolded in ways so strange, tortuous and bizarre ... with so many ironies, and paradoxes, plagued by such deep incongruities between means and ends and marred by so large a gulf between intentions and results (1986:311).

Notably, the Cultural Revolution was a massive attempt by Mao to
inculcate the younger generation of Chinese with his ardor for totalitarian iconoclasm. At the outset, "the four olds", especially the continuing influences of traditional religions and philosophies and reverence for past imperial dynasties—"feudal superstitions"—were attacked. Since these were responsible for some of the finest and grandest examples of China’s rich architectural heritage, from isolated temples on mountain tops to entire cities and monumental palaces and tombs, the unleashing of the Red Guards led to wholesale destruction of heritage sites on a massive scale. To provide but one example, 1000 years ago, Xian was "the supreme metropolis of the medieval world, unrivaled by Baghdad and surpassing Rome" (Brown 1991). The city was originally laid out in blocks with a Buddhist monastery allotted to each block, of which there were several hundred. All of these were either completely destroyed or severely damaged by the Red Guards. Xi Wu Tai, the Five Western Terraces, were once a vast collection of Buddhist temples erected on five hills in the heart of Xian. Today, only half of one temple remains, the rest destroyed by the Red Guards. The cultural vandalism of Xian was but one of many thousands of cities and sites devastated by the Cultural Revolution. The scope of the mass destruction nationwide was so grave that it may never be fully chronicled.

Socialist Ideology and Tourism Under Mao. The communist regimes in China from 1949 until 1978/79 were unaccepting of tourism as an appropriate form of economic activity. Both domestic and international tourism were almost non-existent (Chow 1988; Hudman and Hawkins 1989). Entry was strictly controlled, and from 1954–1978 the China International Travel Service (set up to arrange visits by "foreign friends") played host to only 125,000 visitors (Richter 1989). Tourism activity was held tightly in the hands of the state machinery and reflected the pattern common to other communist states. The limited foreign visitation which existed was sanctioned on the grounds that the successes of communism could be paraded before a selected international audience. Tours focused on the material achievements of communism such as factories, communes and revolutionary peasant, and worker communities. Heritage was not promoted. Contact between tourists and locals was strictly regulated. Segregation in hotels into the categories of foreign tourists, overseas Chinese, Hong Kong and Macau Chinese, and locals, was rigidly enforced (Chow 1988). Tour guides accompanied foreign tourists at all times and were able to "quickly and proficiently report the great strides society and the economy had made under socialism" (Hudman and Hawkins 1989:178). Many of their clients were members of the so-called "international brethren of socialists" whom Hollander (1981) described as "political pilgrims". Most guides were trained in the Beijing Foreign Languages Institutes (the same training ground for China’s diplomatic corps). They were regarded as part of China’s diplomatic effort and an instrument of foreign affairs policy (China National Tourism Administration Bureau 1992). Socialist ideology prevented the emergence of tourism in any real sense for some 30 years after Mao's
assumption of power in 1949: it was a propaganda tool (Qiao 1995) rather than a "proper" form of development.

Socialist Ideology and Cultural Production Under Mao. Consistent with other aspects of cultural policy, the handicrafts sector was subjected to "socialist transformation" during the years of Mao (Toops 1993). The years 1953–56 saw the implementation of the policy of transferring "backward sectors" such as handicrafts from small capitalist operations to collectives which would then be transferred to state ownership. The 1957 "high tide of socialist transformation" saw the acceleration of cooperativization and the elimination of private production of crafts. "By 1958 and the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, there were no private entrepreneurs engaged in the production of crafts for the market. In the handicrafts sector, it was argued that "Socialist collective ownership is good but whole guannmin (people production) is better" (Deng Jie 1958 cited in Toops 1993:90). During the Cultural Revolution, the ideologically driven policies motivated attacks on many traditional activities, destroying thousands of production units and enforcing complete state ownership over surviving craft production since cooperatives were held to be "impure". Other cultural areas were subjected to the same ideological tyranny. Throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution, only eight "revolutionary" stories were permitted; more traditional plays, operas, and folklore festivals had to conform to presentations of these themes.

DENG XIAOPING AND THE "OPEN DOOR" POLICY

Mao died in 1976 and then in 1978, with the acceptance of the need to modernize using all resources available, Deng introduced his "open door" policies and China took a "great leap back" from totalistic iconoclasm. Given the explicit ideological basis of the political system, all economic and other reforms required substantial modifications of the ideological framework (Mackerras, Taneja and Young 1994). Deng had to redefine politics in China and while this change of direction undercut some of the Maoist principles, it was nevertheless essential to reaffirm the primacy of socialism to justify the legitimacy and right of the CCP to govern. Thus, changes had to be rationalized in the context of their capacity to serve socialism. In this way, Deng was able to rehabilitate China's heritage as a valuable resource which was needed to assist in the tasks of restoring national unity after the dissension and trauma of the Cultural Revolution; and revitalizing the economy, in this case by making tourism an acceptable form of development. Both of these objectives could be achieved by combining heritage with tourism.

The Heritage Conservation Act 1982, passed by the 25th meeting of the Operations Committee of the National People's Congress of the CCP on 19 November 1982, embodied these tenets. The preambular paragraph states that the Act is designed "to strengthen the conservation of China's heritage" and "to carry out nationalism, to promote revolutionary traditions, and to build up socialism and
modernization”. The Act moved squarely into areas rejected by Mao’s totalistic iconoclasm, including within its purview:

[not only] those buildings, sites, and memorabilia associated with the revolutionary movement [and] … those valuable documents related to the Revolution,

[but also] those ancient cultural sites, ancient tombs, ancient buildings and architecture, cavern temples and rock engravings, … those valuable artworks and handicrafts representative of different eras in Chinese history, … manuscripts and ancient texts with historical, scientific and artistic value; and those representative objects which reflect the different eras and different ethnic social systems (Heritage Conservation Act 1982, Article 2(i)–(v)).

The Act is comprehensive and accompanying regulations cover the classification of all heritage objects into different categories of national, regional, and local importance; archeology and the excavation of sites; artifacts in museums; private collections; a permit system for the export of artifacts; and a bureaucratic structure for managing the conservation of heritage. The National Cultural Administrative Management Bureau was established and each province, autonomous region, county and municipal (city) council was charged with the responsibility of setting up its own heritage conservation management organization (Article 3 of the Act). This Act provided the foundation for tourism to embrace heritage in its development, as tourism planners in many regions and districts have used the different categories of importance to develop and promote their tourism product.

Of necessity, Deng’s reforms spilled into policies on China’s education system and on the ethnic minorities. Modifications to the education system were required to provide research, technology, and training support for conservation and heritage tourism. Those elements of the social sciences which were considered able to help in Deng’s new vision for the socialist revolution, gradually re-emerged. Thus, archeology, cultural anthropology, and sociology again appeared in universities, although they operated only in those areas accepted as appropriate. Archeological research, for example, was encouraged as a means of cultivating national dignity and unity although lip service was still paid to socialist ideology by restricting interpretation of the past to a Marxist perspective of the evolution of society and by lauding China’s cultural achievements as testimony to the skills of worker-artisans in ancient times (Trigger 1984). Tourism studies appeared in universities as separate courses for the first time, with a very strong emphasis on China’s history, traditions, and culture.

**Policies on the Ethnic Minorities**

There are 55 xiaoshu minzu (minorities) officially recognized by the state. They make up 8% of the population, totalling about 96 million people (Mackerras, Taneja and Young 1994). Although their numbers are comparatively small, they occupy about 65% of China’s total area. Their territories include much of China’s border areas so the min-
orities enjoy a strategic importance well beyond their numbers (Mackerras 1994). Policy formulation towards the minorities is, therefore, bound up in foreign affairs, defense and national security, as well as economic development, education, health, social welfare, and so on. In the confines of this paper, only policy concerning the cultural heritage of the minorities and its concomitant relationship to tourism are considered in any detail.

As Swain noted, xiaoshu minzu “are expected to ultimately evolve into assimilated members of the majority patriarchal socialist society” (1993:37). Under Mao, the ethnic minorities were held to be at different stages on the evolutionary road to communism. Some were classified as “early” into the journey and some as “advanced”—and the thrust of economic, ethnological, linguistic, and other endeavor was to “uplift” them and bring them out of their state of relative backwardness and into the “progressive” socialist fold as quickly as possible. The xiaoshu minzu were thus often targeted during the political campaigns carried out in post-revolution China, including collectivization and the Cultural Revolution.

When Deng's reforms were introduced, cultural diversity per se was not actively promoted, although recognition of special ethnic interests led to the granting of a measure of autonomy to some of the 55 nationalities in an attempt to head off separatist tendencies under the 1984 National Law of Minority Nationalities. Deng was able to assert that “wrong” policies had been imposed and mistakes had been made, so policies and practises more tolerant of traditional minorities' culture were introduced. These included religious freedom, non-application of the one-child rule, and respect for cultural integrity. However, while there is a constitutional commitment to freedom of religion, those practicing religious beliefs were often suppressed and their religious institutions placed under heavy-handed state control. The control exercised by the state on occasion has led to religious disputes, ethnic conflicts, boundary disputes, and in some cases bloodshed, as noted in a speech to the Fourteenth National Congress in 1992 by President Jiang Zemin. Tibetans and Uighurs, for example, have experienced violence related most often to the suppression of their religions, the mainstay of their traditional cultures; and unrest continues to simmer in some of the other ethnic minority regions.

Since 1990, however, a less repressive stance has been adopted towards most of the minorities, and there has been a certain growth in the strength and vitality of minority traditions, including religions, art and languages, rather than cultural decline, according to observers such as Mackerras (1994). At the same time, the unswerving commitment to socialism has been reiterated. Jiang's speech thus noted that “the issue of ethnic religion is always intertwined with ethnic problems”, but that by applying the basic principles of Marx “ethnic problems could be solved” (1992b:2).

The requirement for culture to be a servant of socialist ideology, as propounded by Mao and Deng, was also the major theme of a statement at the Thirteenth National Congress by the Director of Cultural Affairs, Li Zui-huan. In a 20 point list, Li subsequently delivered to a national meeting of artists in 1990, no less than 13 points specifically
mentioned this obligatory aspect. Thus, the need to provide strong support to distinctive ethnic cultures was accepted. But it was also stated that "the purpose of developing ethnic cultures is to better demonstrate the contemporary spirit of socialism". Ethnic minorities were exhorted "to borrow from the old for present use. By giving new meaning to old things, they could form part of socialism's new thinking". Culture did not have to be subordinate to direct political objectives, "but this does not mean that art can deviate from the political direction of serving socialism". Ethnic culture had to be compatible with scientific socialism and "continuously absorb modern science and technology... to preserve and conserve ancient buildings and fragile documents and to unearth buried artifacts... positively to enrich not dilute, destroy, or decrease the values of ethnic culture" (Li Zui-huan 1990:109-110).

However, in a major departure from Mao's policies, Li also stated that:

> It is necessary to create and then protect the right environment to respect and appreciate traditional ethnic culture. Fully use all ethnic minority festivals to promulgate ethnic cultural activities. These kinds of cultural festivals have a long history involving lots of people. Make these festivals a parade to portray the fruitfulness of ethnic culture (Point 15). Cultural education must be started with the young. Actively organize the younger generation in ethnic culture. Take them to cultural performances and have them participate in the festivals. Take them to visit heritage sites (Point 16). The CCP would strengthen its leadership in promulgating the distinctive cultures of the ethnic minorities (Point 20) (1990:111).

Li also stressed that the state could not find all the resources to preserve and promote ethnic culture. Cultural policy had to fit in with economic policy. Development assistance needed to be sought and the nationalities should try to find ways to make money from their heritage. This attempt to synthesize socialism and modernization with the preservation of minority traditional cultures, while artificial and strained in some respects, nevertheless provided further encouragement to tourism planners (among others) to find ways to "make culture pay". Li provided direct encouragement for domestic tourism with his exhortation that the Chinese people should visit heritage sites, cultural festivals and the performing arts. As Qiao noted, tourism was developed "to strengthen local [ethnic] cultural traditions and promote better cultural understanding among people in different parts of the country" (1995:56).

The opening of ethnic minority areas to tourists was also the result of a deliberate policy decision designed to demonstrate to the world the diversity of Chinese culture and how well integrated the minorities were (Matthews and Richter 1991). The Report by President Jiang Zemin to the Fourteenth National Congress in 1992 emphasized that "speeding up the economic development of the ethnic minorities' regions would make an important contribution... to increasing national economic development" (Jiang 1992a). Cultural tourism opportunities, identified as a major pathway to improved living standards, have been a key in bringing minority communities into mainstream tourism development.
Swain (1989, 1993) documented the involvement of the Sani minority of Lunan Yi Autonomous County in tourism from 1949 to the present time. Marginalized by the Communist revolution, they appear to have played no part in the development of tourism to the Yunnan Petrified Forest area for 30 years (from 1953, when the government built a hotel on the edge of a designated park, until the early 80s). At that stage, the government “encouraged private Sani enterprise including Sani-run guest hotels . . . and promoted Sani ethnic tourism by using exotic images of Sani women in native dress for diverse product advertisements and by marketing Sani handicrafts in state stores throughout China” (Swain 1993:39). By the 90s, about 1000 Sani households adjacent to the Petrified Forest were actively engaged in tourism, with the males employed in the service and entertainment sectors of the industry and the women producing ethnic art and carrying on “a brisk trade in money changing” at sellers’ markets they set up outside the major tourist hotels of Kunming (Swain 1993:40).

Toops surveyed the interrelation of craft and tourism activities by the Uighur minority in Xinjiang, noting that in 1953 there were only 11 handicraft cooperatives employing 456 people, but by 1958 (the “high tide of socialism”), there were 986 such cooperatives employing 41,991 people. “Under the slogan of shougongyushangshan [“handicrafts ascend the mountain”] these enterprises were either organized by the state, operating cooperatively or under commune leadership. Collective enterprises grew steadily until the Cultural Revolution when many units were disbanded. In Urumqi, for example, the number of cooperatives fell from more than 100 to 16. By 1980, the handicraft industry had recovered and Xinjiang’s secondary light industry had a value of production of 227 million yuan (1993:91). Toops concluded that:

Governmental policy, while focusing on the economic aspect in handicraft production, has also addressed the cultural needs of the local people of Xinjiang. The Government’s commitment to further production of ethnic distinctive articles derives from both policies of development and ethnicity. Tourism has developed into a new market for the handicraft industry . . . such items as carpets, atlas fabrics, musical instruments, knives, and doppa have become tourist souvenirs. These materials are also ethnic markers of the Uighur people. A duality in crafts production and in the crafts market has been created through tourism requirements (1993:102).

Tourism has thus played a reinforcing role in maintaining and increasing the significance of Uighur minority ethnic crafts in some regions of the Province.

Research by Oakes among the minority Miao of Guizhou, southwest China, where ethnic tourism is being utilized by the state for modernization, demonstrates how the Han-dominated state controls and projects images of the Miao as primitive and exotic, “the antithesis of modernity” (1995:218). The political economy, while reinforcing “traditional” aspects (“selected extractions”) of Miao culture for tourism, constitutes a form of “internal colonialism” in the “highly contested” process of modernization in China (Oakes 1995:216).
Other government-initiated tourism projects also focus on the ethnic minorities. By 1992, for example, overseas tourists could choose from six different ethnic minority tours promoted by the China National Tourism Administration such as "The Silk Road Tour", "The Sherpa Trail", and "The North-West Minority Cultural Tour" (Wei Xiaoan 1993). Another example which brings together many of the policy themes of Li Zui-han and the CCP is the Ethnic Minorities Mini-Games. First staged under Mao in 1953, the Games were subsequently considered to be anti-socialist and abandoned. Resurrected in 1982, and held in 1986 1991, and 1995, the Games feature a major display of the 55 ethnic minorities' cultural heritage in dance, song, traditional arts, crafts and activities. Competitions are held in archery, different forms of traditional wrestling, horse and camel riding, and other sports. The fifth Ethnic Minorities Games, held in Yunnan in November 1995, attracted daily audiences of 100,000, about 10% of whom were overseas visitors. The official opening speech proclaimed that the Games demonstrated to the world the harmony of the ethnic minorities as part of the one big, happy Chinese family where "ethnic cultures bloom" (Television Beijing Central Broadcasting, daily news report, 6 November 1995).

Tibet was also incorporated into the national tourism development plan. State-run tours to Tibet were designed for the same purpose. The independent tourist will find it difficult to obtain a visa for this autonomous region, whereas those on a package tour run by the state-owned China Travel Service have their visa formalities carried out for them with a minimum of fuss. In 1989, China commenced a five-year-long restoration of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, the former residence of the Dalai Lama, in an attempt to demonstrate its concern for, and preservation of, minority cultures. It was opened as a heritage museum in August 1994 in a celebration coinciding with the Shoton, the annual Tibetan harvest festival. Hailed by the Chinese as evidence of their genuine regard for ethnic cultures, the opening drew fierce criticism from the exiled Dalai Lama. Lodi Gyari, a principal adviser to the Dalai Lama and president of the International Campaign for Tibet, was quoted as saying that the Chinese had turned the Potala Palace into a monument of a vanquished people: "Our most sacred palace will become nothing more than a mere showpiece of tourism for Chinese package tours. For Tibetans it's just another example of the death of our culture" (Hong Kong Sunday Morning Post, 7 August 1994). A Xinhua News Agency report (8 August 1994) refuted the criticism, stating that many years of neglect had been rectified, and that the Palace and its furniture, fittings, and artifacts were assured of preservation.

The tension between the conflicting objectives of socialism, modernization, and traditional culture finds a different expression in the opposition of minorities to central government policies on tourism development. The opening of the Potala Palace for tourism raises a number of political and ethical issues which may impact more generally upon other Chinese ethnic minorities. These include questions of political domination, forced assimilation, and lack of empowerment, discrimination, and exploitation practiced by the majority society,
economic impoverishment, and cultural degradation. As seen in a number of nations, the dominant society and its economic interests may develop "authentic" tourism products and market the "exotic" image of traditionally-oriented peoples motivated by profit rather than by any genuine concern about presenting indigenous peoples in a sensitive and just manner (de Kadt 1979; Silver 1993). The United Nations, which designated 1993 as the "International Year for the Indigenous Peoples of the World", noted that such problems are common to many indigenous communities (United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/128 of 17 December 1991).

China's policies towards its ethnic minorities demonstrate a major concern with national security because of the strategic location of many of its indigenous peoples; and these concerns dominate and at times cut diametrically across other policies—such as tourism development—designed to improve the welfare of those peoples. Nevertheless, there are many examples of apparently enthusiastic participation by minorities in a wide range of tourism activities in many parts of China. The great diversity of minorities and their size (approaching 100 million) suggest that any generalizations about China's involvement of its ethnic minorities in tourism must be approached with caution.

Environmental Policy

A brief mention of environmental policy is necessary because it has been one of the areas of major tension between modernization and the values of China's natural and cultural heritage. Its biodiversity ranks eighth in the world and first in the northern hemisphere (Tisdell 1984). Historically, socialism has ignored the environment except in terms of physical resources to be exploited for the economic benefit of the proletariat. Under Mao's collectivization program in 1955 and 1956 and his "Great Leap Forward" in 1958 (an attempt at immediate industrialization), enormous environmental damage occurred. This was compounded by China's reliance on Soviet technology which continues in many of the huge state-owned industrial and agricultural concerns today, a technology which simply disregarded pollution as an issue (Mackerras, Taneja and Young 1994). The "open door" policy, whose primary economic aim was swift development, added to the problems. China's forest cover has been diminished annually by about 5000 km² and in 1994 the proportion of China's area under natural vegetation was substantially smaller than in India (World Resources Institute 1994).

The effects of air pollution, water pollution, acid rain, deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, etc., on heritage sites—and the degradation of the natural heritage—have been devastating in many instances. Only recently have the values of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) appeared in China as the CCP policymakers began to understand the costs of uncontrolled pollution and dollar-driven development: "It has become obvious within China that more attention needs to be given to environmental issues if the country's
economic development programs are not to be stultified” (Tisdell 1993:191).

Tourism, however, has been an agent in attempts to find ways to bridge the differences in objectives of modernization and ESD since 1981. In that year, the State Council issued the guiding policy statement on tourism and the environment, espousing environmental values to protect, preserve and promote natural and cultural heritage. The report acknowledged the previous lack of sound management, poor demarcation of boundaries, and lack of control over mining, forestry, farming, and hunting within designated “Scenic Areas”. It called for comprehensive research to inventorize the country’s scenic and heritage resources and to assess and evaluate their quality, especially those of global importance with unique values. It provided the authority for provincial, city, and autonomous regional governments to set up management bodies, develop environmental standards, implement conservation regimes, and control degradation in tourism regions (Joint Report 1981).

While the application of this policy has been variable and there is clearly considerable room for improvement (Tisdell 1993), tourism has nevertheless been given a leading role in introducing environmentally-sound development. In 1992, for example, three general models for the preservation of biodiversity and economic development were introduced, one of which was an ecotourism development model. By 1993, some 350 new forest parks with a total of some five million acres had been added to the national tourism inventory, two thirds of them since 1990 (Zhang 1995). A major component of the “Educate the Educators” seminar for 70 heads of tourism departments in China’s universities and institutes of tourism held in Shanghai in October 1995 was on ecologically sustainable development and ecotourism (China National Tourism Administration Bureau 1995).

Heritage, Culture, and Tourism Development

In 1978, as part of Deng’s “open door” policy, the Bamboo Curtain was pulled aside; and while a certain ambivalence about tourism remained, the industry was expanded. The first national conference on tourism was held in that year to formulate guidelines and organizational structures for its development (Gao and Zhang 1982). In three different speeches in 1979, Deng emphasized the need for swift growth and development of tourism (He 1992). Politically, tourism was justified—for the first time—as an acceptable industry because in socialist terms it would advance economic reforms and the policy of opening to the outside world, it would further friendship and mutual understanding between the Chinese proletariat and other peoples of the world, and it would contribute to world peace. It was justified in cultural terms by the contribution it could make to national unity through the preservation of folklore and heritage sites.

It is at this juncture that tourism policy and cultural policy engage each other, one of the major consequences of the adoption of a national tourism policy being the restoration and rehabilitation of sites
destroyed during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. Another was the utilization of tourism to bring the ethnic minorities into mainstream economic development as noted previously, and a third was the development of cultural and historical tourism routes. But the decision to embrace the industry was not reached lightly because the Chinese government recognized that international tourism was a major vehicle for modernization which inevitably promoted the penetration of Western values and culture. Cultural policy thus came to the fore and in this context tourism, a valuable new industry and a potentially large generator of foreign exchange earnings, was to be developed around Chinese culture and tradition to mitigate the impact of Western values which might pollute China's heritage. The politics of tourism as a propaganda tool were thus replaced by the politics of tourism as heritage and combined with economic development.

Consistent with China's academic research orientation, considerable effort has gone into the "scientific study" of China's tourism resource distribution and development. Zhang (1995) reviewed classificatory analyses produced by Chinese scholars, many of them geographers, and while spatial elements form the core of their schemata, a common feature is the prominence given to heritage. Even when physical features are listed (State Council's "State Level Scenic Wonders and Historical Sites" (China State Council 1988), and the "Tourism Regions Scheme" of Hebei University (Shen 1993), they cannot be divorced from their place in China's cultural history. The mountains, gorges, rivers, lakes, caves, and other features are all bound up in the images—pictorial, literary, and philosophical—created by emperors, Confucius, mandarins, poets, artists and philosophers of past ages. The physical features often incorporate man-made elements from antiquity—gardens, temples and so forth—so that "many of the most scenic localities are not only a gift of nature but also the product of thousands of years of wisdom and hard work by the Chinese people" (Zhang 1995:43). For example, in 1991, the Huangshan Scenic Area was granted World Heritage Site listing based on its outstanding environmental and cultural resources (UNEP 1991).

In Suzhou, Tiger Hill with its prominent views over the surrounding landscapes is an excellent example of this combination of the physical and the cultural. The entire hill was transformed into gardens by Emperor Wu (500 BC) whose burial tomb is located there. Famous in the history and poetry of Chinese landscaping, the gardens have been fully restored and developed in the last six years as a major recreational and tourism resource and classified as "The historical site of first importance in the Wu region" (Wu County Tourism Administration n.d.). The summit of the hill is crowned by the recently renovated Pagoda of Yun Yan Temple which is one of the earliest brick structures in China, having been constructed in 959 AD. Newly constructed statues of Buddha have been erected at its base and attract a constant stream of worshippers. The gardens of Tiger Hill form the backdrop for regular re-enactments of activities from the court of Emperor Wu and every weekend the Hill swarms with thousands of visitors. Poetic stanzas have been carved into the living rock
of a small gorge and are highlighted in red and blue paint. In Western eyes, this might be regarded as a form of graffiti and thus the antithesis of environmental values. But for the Chinese, the poems enhance the cultural significance of the site and imbue it with profundity. The distinctions which might be drawn in other countries between cultural forms and physical features are often not possible in China. Therefore, the emphasis on heritage must be seen as a very Chinese approach to its tourism development, with internal rather than global forces predominating.

A few examples provide an indication of the rich abundance of cultural resources, their wide distribution throughout the country, and government action to combine heritage and tourism. Funds were provided for the restoration of cultural sites in many places, such as the Ming Tombs, and the Xi'an “terracotta army” of Emperor Qin Shi-huang (only discovered in 1974 after the Red Guards had been disbanded). In 1984, Deng initiated the “Love our country, repair our Great Wall” campaign, which resulted in major restoration of three large sections of the Wall north of Beijing (Badaling, Mutianyu, and Jinshaling). Millions of yuan were (and continue to be) invested in the Great Wall to make it more accessible to tourists. These include a cable car at Mutianyu, a new highway from Beijing to Badaling, and new hotels and restaurants close to sections of the Wall. In Beijing, more than 250 historical and cultural sites have come under national protection. For example, in August 1995, a major program of restoration for the Forbidden City, home to 24 emperors in the Ming and Qing dynasties, was announced. Costed at more than 500 million yuan (¢65 million) and to be carried out in stages over the next five years, it represents the first major work carried out on the Forbidden City since its completion more than 500 years ago.

Work began on hundreds of sites across China to repair the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and the government actively sought international assistance for this purpose, in stark contrast to Mao’s closed door policy. UNESCO has coordinated much international effort. According to the Xinhua News Agency (1995), French interests were to donate $1.5 million to repair a palace hall in the Forbidden City. Japan became a major donor in this context, its Buddhist heritage giving it a particular interest in Buddhist temples and monasteries. These included the construction of an Archeological Research Center at China’s oldest Buddhist shrines at Magao Grotto, Dunhuang which date back to 366 AD (Chan Wai-fong 1994); and the restoration of the Qing Long Si temple complex in Xian where one of Japan’s famous pilgrims, Kobo Daishi, spent the year 805 studying Esoteric Buddhism (Brown 1991).

In 1992 the China National Tourism Administration Bureau selected 249 sites which combined China’s natural and cultural heritage to develop and promote as “national scenic routes” (Wei 1993). They have distinctive themes such as the Great Wall Route, the Cooking Kingdom Route, the Study Route, and the Yangtze River Route. Dunhuang, once an important trading town on the Silk Road, was one of several hundred sites designated as “historical cultural cities”. One hundred and sixteen projects were designed to turn Dunhuang into an
international tourism center. Quanzhou, in southeast China’s Fujian Province, received a similar designation. It has 38 historical sites and cultural relics under state and provincial government protection and a further 212 under the city council’s protection. Restoration had been completed on 40 of the most important sites by December 1994.

As work has proceeded, access for tourists to a wide range of Chinese cultural heritage sites has been approved. Under Mao, less than 12 cities were open to “foreign friends”. One year after Deng “opened the door”, 60 destinations were open; by 1984 there were 200; and by 1987, 469 cities and destinations were “approved” for foreign visitation (Richter 1989). That figure had doubled by 1992 to 888 cities and counties (Wei 1993). Domestic visitation has also increased dramatically—further evidence of the Chinese desire to seek out and experience for themselves the famous heritage sites of their “common knowledge”. The relaxation after 1978 of Mao’s strict control over tourism (which was enforced through the imposition of a permit system for the purchase of a train or bus ticket and accommodation) has been the key factor in the growth of domestic tourism.

Within the new context, physical sites have been rehabilitated in China’s rapid move to embrace heritage as a major component of tourism. Traditional festivals, religious ceremonies and pilgrimages, classical plays and re-enactments of historical events have all been revived around the country. These stand as statements of culture, community identity, or religious affiliation, and as tourism events manifesting the Chineseness of the occasion for both domestic and overseas visitors. In 1993 the CNTA identified 40 festivals and celebrations that could serve to promote tourism (Zhang 1995). Pilgrimages to sacred sites and religious ceremonies by both domestic and overseas visitors are commonplace. As Swain noted in her review of Chun-fan Yu’s film on the Buddhist Kuan-yin Pilgrimages, “religious tourism is a big business in China and it is here to stay” (Swain 1992:161).

Other festivals have also been “recycled”, such as the Gohk Chin or Chrysanthemum Festival of Xiaolan (Siu 1990). This was celebrated every 60 years to mark the founding of the city several centuries ago. In the past, the festival was a domestic affair organized by the city’s clan associations, landlords, and merchants for Xiaolan’s residents. It was last held in traditional form in 1934 when China was ruled by the Kuomintang. The values underlying the Festival—of upholding ancient superstition, of perpetuating and venerating traditional culture, of reinforcing the leadership roles of the lineage associations (feudalism), and of a “capitalist” pursuit of wealth—were abhorrent to the socialist, scientific philosophy of Marxism; and when the city’s Revolutionary Council decided to hold a chrysanthemum festival in 1959 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, it was redesigned to “fit” Maoist principles (Siu 1990).

In 1979 and again in 1994, the festival was restaged. In 1979 it was designed to demonstrate that under Deng’s “open door” policy, the Chinese government was serious about economic reform, and potential investors from Hong Kong, Macau, and other overseas Chinese communities were invited. Some 140,000 visitors attended the Festival
In 1994, the 16th anniversary again came round and the city put an even greater effort into a much grander festival. Two formerly forbidden elements were major components: tourism and real-estate marketing. The Xiaolan City Council blatantly exploited the city’s heritage for financial gain. The China Travel Service highlighted the festival in its global marketing. More than one million visitors (many thousands from overseas) were attracted to the Gokh Chin. Once “captured”, the visitors were then exposed to an estimated $20 million worth of condominium developments for sale which had been constructed along the avenues where the mass chrysanthemums were displayed.

The manner of staging the Chrysanthemum festival in 1994 emphasized the continuing transformation of China from a socialist, centrally controlled economy to a more open, capitalist-oriented economy. It exemplified the key role which tourism is playing in the dynamics of change in China, change which allowed the festival to be organized in 1994 in bold contradiction of orthodox CCP ideology. Similar scenes are being repeated in many cities and towns throughout China as tourism expands almost exponentially. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990) and Richards (1996) have noted a similar close linkage between cultural and economic values in examining European heritage tourism.

**Heritage Theme Parks**

Two sites which reflect different aspects of the policies of the CCP on tourism, heritage, and ethnic minorities have been developed during the past seven years at Shenzhen, a new city in Guangdong Province near the border with Hong Kong. One is called “Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spots” and the other is called the “China Folk Culture Villages”. Both theme parks were constructed by the state-owned China Travel Service (CTS) in partnership with a Hong Kong registered company, China Travel International Investment Limited. The activities of the CTS are directed by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the PRC State Council. The State Council directed CTS to invest in, develop and manage “Overseas Chinese Town” in Shenzhen in 1985. This is “a comprehensive development which incorporates export industries, commerce, trading, real estate, tourism and culture” (China Travel International Investment 1993). If the original objective was to entice international visitors to China, domestic tourism has, in fact, overwhelmed both sites.

**The Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spots.** This theme park opened in September 1989 and features miniatures of the best known scenic spots in China, occupying an area of 3.27 km². There are “about one hundred scenic wonders . . ., which are the epitome of China’s long-standing history, brilliant culture, beautiful scenic heritage and rich historical sites”. No memorial to the peasants and workers of ancient China, the park depicts such built heritage as “the world’s biggest palace” (the Imperial Palace); “the world’s largest Buddha” (the Le
Shan Grand Buddha Statue); “the world’s most splendid building located at the highest land above sea level” (the Potala Palace); “the world’s longest rampart” (the Great Wall of China); and many more palaces and temples such as the mausoleum of Genghis Khan and the mosque of Emperor Xiang Fei (Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spots 1994). More than 50,000 Lilliputian ceramic figurines “inhabit” the various “spots” and again the emphasis is not on the lifestyle of the peasant and worker as Mao would have insisted, but on scenes such as the wedding ceremony of Emperor Guang Xu in the Imperial Palace, a memorial ceremony to Confucius in his family temple, emperors praying for good harvests, an imperial funeral, and astronomer mandarins at work in the world’s oldest “Ancient Star Observatory”. 

In addition to the built heritage, there are 12 miniaturized heritage landscapes such as the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River, Mount Taishan, and the Yunnan Petrified Forest. There are also 11 ethnic village scenes. These latter depict minority village life with peasants engaged in tilling paddy, fishing, constructing a new dwelling or, in the case of the Mongolian grasslands, festive activities such as archery, wrestling and horse racing. The theme park is a window into China’s history, culture and heritage. Since its opening it has consistently attracted 3 million visitors per year, of whom around 300,000 (about 15%) have been overseas visitors. It stands in stark contrast to the edicts of Mao to annihilate the past and the failed attempt of the Cultural Revolution to blot out China’s heritage from the national ethos. It is consistent with the government’s post-Mao cultural policies to promote national identity by drawing upon its heritage in full measure. At the same time, it pays lip service to the role of the peasant and worker with its depiction of village scenes. It is also consistent with Deng’s pragmatic “open door” policy and the perceived need to develop the potential of the tourism industry to maximize income generation and assist in the economic development of China. It draws heavily upon the research of academics in related fields (archaeology, history, anthropology, etc). It may thus be said to be making a positive contribution to the socialist objectives of the CCP.

Another theme park, the China Folk Culture Villages covers an area of 2.38 square kilometres and opened in August 1991 to present the architecture, folk arts (music, dancing, craft work) and culture of 23 of the ethnic minorities. It contains features such as houses and other buildings of the Bouyei people, the Dong, the Jingpo, the Miao, the Yao, the Yi, and the Zhuang minorities, a Tibetan house and lamasery, yurts from Inner Mongolia and Kazakhstan, the Tujia overwater market of Xianju, Buddhist pagodas from Nanfeng and the Dai autonomous region, a mosque from Uighur, and many other attractions. In its first full year of operations 1992, almost 4.3 million visitors (of whom 790,000 were from overseas and Hong Kong) toured the park (China Travel International Investment 1993). 

Several of the dwellings have been transported from their original sites and re-erected, authentic in origin but now of course located in a composite village of 23 other nationalities rather than in their original homogenous cultural setting. Other buildings are replicas
which closely follow traditional architecture, construction methods, and materials such as the Uighur house and the thatched-roofed Hani compound. Artifacts within the buildings are usually the genuine (authentic) article and are positioned as they would be in their source home; but they may be displayed under neon lights with a waterproof concrete floor underfoot (such as the fittings and floor coverings inside the camel-felt yurt of the nomadic Kazaks).

The “inhabitants” in the Folk Culture Villages theme park are all of the appropriate ethnicity. An important criterion for selection is that they should not have been out of their villages before being employed in Shenzhen, in order to portray authentic behavior unpolluted by external influences. They demonstrate traditional skills such as the manufacture of artifacts according to traditional methods utilizing traditional materials, sing traditional songs in their own languages, play a wide range of traditional musical instruments, and dance and present other aspects of folklore (camel riding, acrobatics, cooking local dishes, and so on). These, according to the management, “faithfully portray the life, customs, and conditions of different nationalities in the villages” (Shenzhen Splendid China Development 1994). However, all the “inhabitants” are aged from 18–25 years, and may be described as vibrant and beautiful. Middle-aged and elderly people are conspicuous by their absence. Some of the activities (such as dances and ceremonies) have been modified for presentation to tourists, most obviously in the evening Grand Parade involving all of the ethnic minorities, so that much of the original form and meaning is lost. It is also assumed that the craft and other skills accumulated through years of practise are absent in most of the young people. Therefore, the quality of the presentations must be interpreted in this context as well as whether any trivialization has occurred. The end result is a mix of the authentic and the artificial.

In briefly considering the question of authenticity of the Culture Villages, one is immediately confronted with a variation of what Bonniface and Fowler have termed “the moving object story” (1993:121). In their view, this relates to artifacts such as paintings and statues which have been removed from their original geographical and cultural milieu to an alien context. The object remains authentic but its context is not, which raises the question of authenticity (Swarbrooke 1994). In the Culture Villages, the validity of this question is exposed by the expressed policy which guided its construction: “Originating from real life but rising above it, and discarding the dross and selecting the essential” (Shenzhen Splendid China Development 1994). Paradoxically, both reality and unreality have been heightened. This kind of mix of entertainment and education, of authenticity and fabrication, has been seen by some commentators as a manifestation of postmodernism (Urry 1990). For Eco (1986:1) it is “hyper-reality”.

Nuryanti has suggested that “postmodern tourists use the power of their intellect and imagination to receive and communicate messages, constructing their own sense of historic places to create their individual journeys of self-discovery” (1996:250–251). In this context, the Folk Culture Villages theme park could be described as “a semiotic system whereby a set of signs marks the displays as authentic, both
with respect to the markers themselves and to the outside world” (Harkin 1995:653). In the quest for authenticity, the buildings and the material items form the backdrop for people as objects, and to the visitors they are engaged in (not acting) their “traditional” lifestyles in “authentic” environments. Visitors will eagerly join the young dancers from Turkestan in a whirling dervish, and the dance will be not one whit the less authentic for the onlookers for having non-Turkestan dancers in its midst. The relationship of marker to tourist, of authentic to commodified actuality, is highly dynamic.

In the case of the Miniature Scenic Spots theme park, there is a simultaneous fusion of the authentic and the marker for Chinese tourists. The reality of the Great Wall of China is accepted as readily in the miniaturized reproduction in Shenzhen as in the abstract images known through the poems and paintings of China’s ancient scholars. Chinese tourists will pose for photographs in front of the Shenzhen small Wall in such a way that it dwarfs them as does the real Wall; and the photographic image is presented as evidence of an authentic experience. Yellow Crane Terrace, immortalized in Li Bai’s poem of farewell 1,300 years ago, is eagerly sought out by Chinese visitors to the theme park. In viewing the miniaturized reproduction the “common knowledge” of the image created by Li Bai asserts itself, it is at once familiar and yet new. The reproduction is “consumed”, in part through Li Bai’s interpretation as if it were the orginal, in part as a Lilliputian tourism object signifying the original; and the result is a post-modern expression of the original providing an authentic, albeit different, experience from the original. It is an example of Nuryanti’s “individual journey of self-discovery” coupled with a re-affirmation of the Chineseness of the participant observer. Where MacCannell (1976:44) considered the distinction between authentic original and mechanical reproduction as essential to the marking of an authentic tourism object or sight (its “sacralization”), to the Chinese the “aura of the original” (Benjamin quoted in Harkin 1995:653) may imbue a reproduction of a famous site, object or event and thus produce a tourism experience in its own right. As Harkin noted “What is considered the authentic sight, versus the tourist marker, is not necessarily fixed” (1995:653).

If one returns to the global-local nexus, there is a perception that global market demand has contributed to the development of both of these theme parks in Shenzhen. Certainly the more recent construction of the “Window of the World”, a third theme park in Shenzhen with its Eiffel Tower from Paris, miniaturized Basilica of Rome, pyramids of Egypt, White House from Washington DC, Taj Mahal from India, Borobodur Temple from Indonesia, Serengeti Game Park from East Africa and Sydney Opera House from Australia (among many others), may be viewed as a direct response to these forces. The geographic proximity of Shenzhen to external markets from the gateway of Hong Kong has facilitated their access for international visitation.

But the Folk Culture Villages and Splendid China Miniature Scenic Spots theme parks are not simply responses in the first instance to the forces of globalization. As noted, they are expressions of the
“common knowledge” of Chineseness and serve essentially internal Chinese objectives in terms of strengthening cultural identity and economic development, with lesser emphasis on being objects for the touristic gaze meeting purely touristic ends. They are experienced by 6 to 8 times more Chinese domestic visitors than overseas Chinese and more than 20 to 30 times other overseas visitors. This is an important distinction: while Chinese are participant observers and “experience” the theme parks, non-Chinese “look at” them. The parks may, however, legitimately be interpreted as part of a certain “globalization of ethnicity” (Robins 1991:131) and as such constitute what Chang et al refer to as “interaction between global processes and local forces” where “the celebration of indigenous cultures and emphasis on local identity has become a global ‘best practice’ among urban and tourism planners” (1996:301).

In political terms, the Folk Culture Villages theme park embodies the essence of CCP policy towards democracy, religious freedom, and support for ethnic cultures, designed to demonstrate to its own population, and the world, the tolerance of Chinese socialism. The Tibetan lamasery and the Uighur mosque are religious buildings only in terms of their original purpose and are now displayed as a political symbol as well as for the touristic gaze. The theme park “showcases” the integration of the minorities into the one happy Chinese cultural family and the unity of the Chinese peoples. It promotes, and in doing so preserves to a certain extent, the arts of the ethnic minorities as dynamic elements of their different cultural heritages. It draws extensively upon the work of cultural anthropology. It serves the dual purpose of being both educational and entertaining. The requirement that culture should serve socialism is achieved through the “soft sell” approach: heavy-handed ideological exhortations to work for the glory of China, or posters extolling the virtues of socialism, are non-existent in the park. To the extent that the Folk Culture Villages serves the ideologically-determined objectives of the Chinese state, the theme park may be said to be propagandist. That is a legitimate political function in the Chinese context. However, it is also a successful theme park in its own right, providing a high degree of visitor satisfaction and returning a profit for its owners (Shenzhen Splendid China Development 1994).

CONCLUSION

Under Deng’s “open door” policy, tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors in China’s drive to modernize. This growth has been fueled largely by domestic tourism with the China National Tourism Administration Bureau estimating that more than 360 million trips were made in 1993 (Qiao 1995). This figure has been projected to reach 700 million by the year 2000 (Wei and Feng cited in Zhang 1995). Cultural, historical and religious attractions are major destinations. To borrow a phrase from anthropological research, the “participant observation experience” of attractions for Chinese domestic tourists, embedded in Petersen’s (1995) sense of cultural pilgrimage, Chineseness and common knowledge, constitutes a strong refutation of Boorstin’s denigration of the nature of attractions as “a
new species: the most attenuated form of a nation’s culture” and “of little significance for the inward life of a people . . .” (1964:103). There is a better “fit” with MacCannell’s (1976) view that the consumption of a tourism attraction invests it with meaning and a perception of authenticity even where commodification has raised barriers to authenticity, where global demand has modified and blurred the distinction between the cultural and the economic. For many Chinese, the act of visiting their famous sites may be akin to Urry’s (1990) view that tourism itself is an expression of culture.

However, while the pace of cultural revival and conservation activity has increased dramatically in the past five years, there is a degree of unevenness in the application of conservation measures. In some areas there exists an “implementation gap” (Dunsire 1978) between the rhetoric of policy and the reality. Provinces, counties, and cities have been swift to draw up lists of heritage sites, but a break has occurred between intent and result. It is not now as great as Tisdell found during his fieldwork in 1989 when he noted that “comparatively speaking the provision, upkeep, restoration and preservation of tourist attractions has been neglected” (1993:173). But the devolution of responsibility to implement the 1982 Heritage Conservation Act to the different levels of local government (Article 3 of the Act) and the fact that “The costs of conservation and management of the nation’s heritage treasures are to be included in national and local budgets” (Article 6 of the Act) have resulted in patchy efforts, especially where local finances are not great.

Authenticity also appears to be a flexible notion, and the manipulation of festivals and other cultural events to serve economic interests without due regard to their cultural integrity has resulted in the loss of heritage quality and educational value: spectacle and entertainment seem to be rated more highly. During visits to more than 100 heritage sites in China between 1993–95, the authors discovered that on close examination many of the restorations of buildings, statues, and other artifacts had been carried out with contemporary materials such as reinforced concrete, steel bolts and plastic, disguised to look like ancient timber, hand-fired bricks or stone carvings. As with Singapore’s planning for heritage conservation (Teo and Huang 1995), in many instances heritage in China has been commoditized to the point where a balance with historical and sociocultural veracity has been lost. There is a certain “museumization” of the ethnic minorities in the idealized presentations of their culture for tourist consumption which also raises issues broader than authenticity and extends into the difficult questions of cultural integration, assimilation and political control. Environmental issues are only now being considered: addressing ecologically sustainable development in a serious and nationally comprehensive way is still in a distant future.

The China National Tourism Administration Bureau is aware of these deficiencies, but some of the provincial tourism authorities do not appear to appreciate the need for a code of heritage values such as that adopted by Japan. There, in terms of built heritage, comprehensive legislation “mandates the recovery of the original structure” and “a combination of exemplary scholarship and meticulous
craftsmanship produces heritage monuments that are highly authentic by prevailing international professional standards” (Ehrentraut 1993:270). To paraphrase Hulstman (1995), the intrinsic values associated with the immense richness of China’s history and culture are in danger of being ignored at the expense of the extrinsic value of the income derived from heritage tourism.

Because tourism has embraced cultural heritage, and yet must serve the country’s goals of modernization and at the same time remain true to socialism, tourism development in China is highly politicized. Unraveling the continuities and discontinuities in China’s cultural policies over the past four and a half decades is a necessary prerequisite to understanding the nature of China’s development of tourism, its presentation of China to the outside world since the communist revolution in 1949, and its growing contribution to internal stability. Because of the political determinism of the CCP and its quest to maintain power, echoes of the ambivalence and ambiguity towards China’s heritage which Lin identified in 1979, remain. Yet cultural policy has undergone significant modification to find expression in tourism. The dominant role that heritage currently plays in the country’s tourism product is in stark contrast to the totalistic iconoclasm promoted by Mao and the mass destruction of heritage which occurred during the Cultural Revolution.

Tourism policy formulation has had to contend with the centrifugal tensions of socialism, modernization, and traditional culture, while providing the CCP with an avenue to reconcile at least some of the contradictions. The process has involved far more than mental gymnastics, for the issues have been fundamental to the legitimacy of government by the CCP in China and have thus penetrated to the core of politics. As President Jiang Zemin stated in his address to the Fifth Plenum of the 14th Central Plenum of the CCP held in September 1995, “Stability is the premise for development and reform, and development and reform require a stable political and social environment” (Xinhua News Agency 9 October 1995). The CCP believes that only it can provide that stability. Therefore, the CCP has been obliged to balance the ideological necessity of maintaining the purity of socialist ideology to uphold the legitimacy of the CCP government with the pragmatic concerns of developing the economy, and with appeasing the strategically important minorities. Culturally the CCP has pushed Han heritage as national heritage, promoting national unity through a presented common heritage.

The tourism industry has demonstrated a capacity to assist in all three cultures: i.e. it is increasingly important to national economic growth (modernization), and its capacity to incorporate heritage in a meaningful way has assisted in bringing the minorities into mainstream development. In terms of the educational system in China, tourism has provided added legitimacy for some areas of academic endeavour which in the past had been banned, and also contributed to its modernization, with the adoption for the first time of tourism diploma and degree courses in universities. It has also been utilized by the CCP as a vehicle to advance environmentally sustainable values, particularly in respect of cultural heritage.
Tourism, in short, has provided various contradictory forces and interests in China with a means of reconciling at least in part their different objectives and satisfying to some extent their different aspirations, even if that contribution is difficult to measure accurately, and contradictory perhaps as a global force of modernity. But it has not always been deliberately formulated policy which has granted this role to tourism; Chinese government policies on culture and tourism were not originally issued and developed under the same historical and political framework. In the past decade, however, both have come together to some extent and found expression in tourism outcomes. In this a major force has been the strength of the Chineseness of common knowledge about a great many sites around China. There is, as Petersen (1995) has commented, a strong sense of “cultural pilgrimage” in much domestic tourism in China. Thus while endogenous forces have been the major factor in China’s contemporary dual embrace of heritage and tourism, there is a nexus between global-local processes and this interaction is evident in some of the diverse forms of China’s contemporary heritage tourism.

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Submitted 28 November 1995
Resubmitted 3 September 1996
Resubmitted 18 May 1997
Accepted 12 August 1997
Refereed anonymously
Coordinating Editor: Margaret B. Swain