

# EAST AND WEST

BON  
THE EVERLASTING RELIGION OF TIBET

TIBETAN STUDIES IN HONOUR OF  
PROFESSOR DAVID L. SNELLGROVE

Papers Presented at the International Conference on Bon  
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New Horizons of Bon Studies, 2

Samten G. Karmay and Donatella Rossi, Editors

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	— <i>Archives of Asian Art</i>
AAH	— <i>Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
ACASA	— <i>Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America</i>
ActaO	— <i>Acta Orientalia</i> , Copenhagen
ActaOH	— <i>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
ADMG	— <i>Abhandlungen der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
AION	— <i>Annali dell'Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli</i>
AJA	— <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AMI	— <i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i>
ArOr	— <i>Archiv Orientální</i>
ASIAR	— <i>Annual Reports</i> (Archaeological Survey of India)
BEFEO	— <i>Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
BMC	— <i>Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum</i>
BMFEA	— <i>Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities</i>
BMMA	— <i>Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art</i>
BSO(A)S	— <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
CAH	— <i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CAJ	— <i>Central Asiatic Journal</i>
CHC	— <i>Cambridge History of China</i>
CHInd	— <i>Cambridge History of India</i>
CHIr	— <i>Cambridge History of Iran</i>
CIIInd	— <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum</i>
CIIr	— <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum</i>
CIS	— <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
CRAI	— <i>Comptes rendus des séances</i> (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres)
EW	— <i>East and West</i>
HJAS	— <i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
HR	— <i>History of Religions</i>
IJJ	— <i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
JA	— <i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAH	— <i>Journal of Asian History</i>
JAOS	— <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>

- JAS — *Journal of Asian Studies*
- JASB — *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
- JESHO — *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
- JGJRI — *Journal of the Ganganath Jha Research Institute*
- JLABS — *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*
- JISOA — *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*
- JNES — *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JRAS — *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*
- JUPHS — *Journal of the Uttar Pradesh (formerly: United Provinces) Historical Society*
- KSIA — *Kratkie soobščeniya Instituta Arheologii*
- MASI — *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*
- MCB — *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*
- MDAFA — *Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan*
- MIA — *Materialy i issledovanija po Arheologii SSSR*
- MTB — *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tôyô Bunko*
- NTS — *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap*
- OLZ — *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*
- PSAS — *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*
- REI — *Revue des Études Islamiques*
- RepMem — *Reports and Memoirs (IsIAO [formerly IsMEO], Centro Studi e Scavi Archeologici)*
- RHR — *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*
- RSO — *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*
- SA — *Sovetskaja Arheologija*
- SAS — *South Asian Studies*
- SOR — *Serie Orientale Roma (IsIAO [formerly IsMEO])*
- TOCS — *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*
- TP — *T'oung Pao*
- TPS — *Transactions of the Philological Society*
- VDI — *Vestnik drevnej istorii*
- WZKM — *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
- WZKS — *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens und Archiv für indische Philosophie*
- ZAS — *Zentralasiatische Studien*
- ZDMG — *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*



## Preface

*It is with great pleasure that I welcome the publication of this Special Volume in the East and West collection. The unique series of articles contained in the present Volume definitely show the state-of-the-art in terms of research carried out by first-rate scholars in a great variety of fields pertaining to the ever-flourishing discipline of Tibetan Studies; however, their value becomes even greater, if we consider that they were all written to honour the geniality and the pioneering work of the great scholar to whom the Volume is wholeheartedly dedicated: Professor David Llewellyn Snellgrove. I take this opportunity to express my admiration and respect for his scholarship, and also for his personal character, which I have both appreciated in various occasions, occasions that have also progressively become the locus of our longstanding relation and friendship.*

*Prof. Snellgrove was the first Western scholar to embark, during the second half of last century, in the daunting task of presenting the Bon religion and its multi-faceted expressions in a way that eschewed biased cultural superimpositions, thus allowing this religious tradition to finally speak for itself, by way of some of its most knowledgeable representatives. In the touching Introduction written by Prof. Karmay, readers will be able to understand the ways in which such a seminal task was undertaken. The results and effects of David Snellgrove pioneering endeavours, as well as the influence of his far-reaching vision can now be assessed through the philological and field researches, publications, and conference panels focused upon the Bon religion and Bonpo traditions, which have multiplied during the course of time, and which continue to shed light and deepen our understanding of one of the most valuable components of the Tibetan culture, especially as far as its foundation and origins are concerned.*

*In this regard, we cannot but gratefully turn our minds to the memory of Giuseppe Tucci, who in addition to his innumerable outstanding accomplishments, founded the East and West Review in 1950. I believe that the prestige of this historical Review is confirmed and enhanced by this Special Volume, and I hope that in future times it will also come to be considered as a preferred interface for many more scholarly works in the field of Tibetology, such as the ones presented here.*

GHERARDO GNOLI



## Introduction

From the 22nd to 25th of June 2008 an international conference on the Bon religion was held under the auspices of the Bon religious centre Shenten Dargye Ling at Blou, France. It was Rev. Tenpa Yungdrung, the Abbot of the Tritan Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu and the head of Shenten Dargye Ling who wished for a conference of scholars of Bon studies to be convened. This was part of his project to foster the development of Bon studies by scholars in parallel with the spiritual practices which the religion professes, and whose centuries old spiritual tradition brings benefits to modern practitioners. An Organizing Committee consisting of four members, the Abbot himself, Isabelle Catona, Stéphane Arguillère, and myself was formed. The conference was entitled: Bon, the Indigenous Source of Tibetan Religion and Culture. The conference was attended by internationally renowned scholars in the field, and by a number of young Ph.D. candidates from The Netherlands, Japan, China, and Taiwan. Twenty-seven out of thirty-three, who were invited, participated in the gathering. They were from twelve countries.

It turned out to be a very enjoyable occasion, blessed with good weather, and the calm of the country-side of the Val de Loire.

However, this was not the first time such an international conference on the Bon religion had been organized. In 2002 Professor Yasuhiko Nagano of The National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan convened a similar one under the title of New Horizons of Bon Studies. It was the first of its kind. Its proceedings were published in 2000 (*New Horizons of Bon Studies*, Bon Studies, 2, Senri Ethnological Reports, 15, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka).

European Bon studies date back to the nineteenth century, but it was only in the 1960s that a serious attempt was made for the first time to understand the religion, its history, and literature with the first-hand knowledge of the indigenous sources, a rarity outside of Tibet before 1959.

It was Professor David Llewellyn Snellgrove, who having developed a strong interest in the Bon religion after his field trip to Dolpo in 1956, embarked on a research project of this religion. In 1961, with the financial assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, he invited Lupon Tenzin Namdak, Sangye Tenzin, now the Abbot of the Menri Monastery (Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India), and myself to the University of London to work with him. We were refugees in India.

Although this volume is published in his honour, it is not my intention to give a detailed account of David's life here: this is far beyond our scope, and also beyond the too many facets of this great traveler-scholar, who covered almost every field of oriental studies. Moreover, Dr Tadeusz Skorupski has written an excellent account

of David's life entitled 'The life and Adventures of David Snellgrove' in *Indo-Tibetan Studies*, which is dedicated to him (*Indo-Tibetan Studies*, Buddhica Britannica, Series continua II, The Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring, U.K. 1990, pp. 1-21). David himself has also published a major account of his own life (*Asian Commitment, Travels and Studies in the Indian Sub-Continent and Southeast Asia*, White Orchid 2000).

I met David in India in March 1961. One early morning around six o'clock somebody woke me up. I was sleeping on a long table in a printing house in Old Delhi where my companion Sangye Tenzin and I were having Bon texts printed. I was completely taken by surprise by his sudden incursion. He was the first Western man I had come across then. He said something to me which I could scarcely understand, but finally I managed to work out that he would come and see me later on that day. It was a few months later on the green lawn near the edge of a swimming pool in the Claridges Hotel's garden in New Delhi that for the first time he began to teach us the Roman alphabet, after giving an exercise book and a pencil to each of us.

In order to help us open our minds to other non-Tibetan religions, he often led us to visit Churches, Christian monasteries and to attend Masses on Sundays in the local church, where we used to light candles. After arriving in England from India in 1961, he let us all lodge in his house in Berkhamsted for more than six months. He himself being a bachelor, there were no other family members at his home. This gave us a unique chance to know David, who in a very short time had become somewhat of a father-figure for all of us, particularly for myself, since I was the youngest one in the group.

From the very beginning of our meeting he began to initiate us into Western education by teaching us such subjects as geography, history of religions, and science, not in formal college classes, but through conversations at meal times, or during afternoon walks in the woods.

\* \* \*

Later David began to work with the assistance of Lupon Tenzin Namdak on the translation of excerpts from the twelve volume, fourteenth century compendium called *gZi brjid*, The Glorious One. It was an experience to watch the two working side by side at the same desk. Most of the time they worked very calmly, but there were moments when they stumbled over difficult passages, and you could feel their frustration and hot temper. Later, in his Introduction to the volume, David wrote:

Tibetans who can help with these texts are now very rare indeed [...] They know their monastic liturgies and the names of their own *bonpo* gods, but very rarely indeed are they at all experienced in reading the sort of *bonpo* texts in which we most need assistance, namely material which represents 'pre-Buddhist' traditions. This lack of familiarity on the part of present-day *bonpos* with what Western scholars would regard as real *bonpo* material, may come as a disappointment.

It was true: we totally lacked the modern philological method of critical reading and explaining which we were then learning from him.

In 1967 the fruit of this cooperation was later published under the title of *Nine Ways of Bon* (London Oriental Series, Vol. 18, Oxford University Press, London).

This publication, which prompted further academic interest in the subject, laid a solid foundation for future studies of the Bon religion. Since then, a number of works has been published, and it is most encouraging to see that more and more young scholars have taken up Bon studies. This is not just an isolated development, but falls within the general upward trend of Tibetology. At the Conference in Blou, when it was proposed that the proceedings be published in honour of David in recognition of his pioneering work, all the participants unanimously agreed.

In October 2008, when I was writing this introduction, a *Festschrift* was very kindly published in my honour by Françoise Pommaret and Jean-Luc Achard in *Revue Tibétaine (RET)*, 14, 15, 2008). David contributed to the volume by writing an article entitled 'How Samten came to Europe'. Naturally, I thanked him for his kind contribution. Later, I received an e-mail message from David, who is now 88 years old, reading:

Thank you for your kind message. I have led a quiet summer here, swimming every day so long as the weather was good. I shall leave here for Cambodia on October 27th (2008), and intend to stay at my house in Siem Reap until mid-March. I lead a very quiet life, made up of reading, writing, swimming, and short walks around Angkor [...]

It is encouraging that he is still carrying on his intellectual life.

\* \* \*

The present volume contains most of the papers presented at the conference, and it shows various aspects related to Bon studies.

The first part begins with a discussion whether Bon has any connection with Shamanism. This is followed by a presentation of Zhang zhung which was regarded as the place where the Bon religion originated. That leads to the study of the concept of the 'sacred'. A recent discovery of ancient Bon manuscripts is then discussed.

The second part begins with the study of the monastic discipline. It is followed by the study of rDzogs chen tradition and the philosophical concept of the 'two truths'.

The third part deals with history and practice of medicine. These are followed by the studies of the ancient yogic practices, and the concept of the 'intermediate state'.

The fourth part contains an anthropological study of the 'Soul-retrieval ritual', accounts of reconstructions of monasteries, aspects of the local culture and language of the Sharwa people in Shar khog (Amdo), a full account of Bon studies in modern China, and an overview of the collection of Bonpo texts of the Giuseppe Tucci Fund preserved at IsIAO.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Gherardo Gnoli, President of IsIAO, for graciously accepting to publish the proceedings of the conference in the *East and West* journal.

The two editors also owe many thanks to Dr Francesco D'Arelli, Director of IsIAO Library, who very kindly gave us much advice for the preparation of this publication, and to Dr Beniamino Melasecchi, Art Director of *East and West*, for his precious cooperation.

SAMTEN GYALTSEN KARMAY  
Kyoto, October 2008

# From Temple to Commodity? Tourism in Songpan and the Bon Monasteries of A'mdo Shar khog

by MONA SCHREMPF  
and JACK PATRICK HAYES

## *Introduction*

Since 1999, after the logging ban and at the beginning of the 'Opening of the West' Campaign (Ch. *Xibu da kaifa*) Songpan County and its main town known by the same name (Tib. Zung chu mkhar) has undergone major visible transformations through tourism development<sup>(1)</sup>. These include the Tibetan area of Shar khog<sup>(2)</sup> with its small Bon po villages and rebuilt monasteries situated to the north of Songpan town, and also the former Bon pilgrimage mountain of Shar Dung ri ('Eastern Conch Mountain') surrounded by beautiful forest and turquoise-colored lakes (Tib. gSer mtsho), now known as Huanglong Nature Reserve<sup>(3)</sup>. In order to better understand the diversity of local developments and transformations through tourism, we will focus on and compare the rural Tibetan area of Shar khog with its Bon monasteries, some of which have engaged in tourism in the past nine years, and urban tourism of Songpan town.

In 1999, the *China Daily* announced that southwest China's Sichuan province had initiated a dozen new tour routes as part of the 1999 nationwide 'eco-tourism' campaign<sup>(4)</sup>. The list included tours that connected the Chinese Buddhist

<sup>(1)</sup> Acknowledgement: Parts of this article were presented by Mona Schrepf at the conference 'Exploding Cities: Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development of Historic Cities in Asia. Safeguarding Traditions and Ancient Knowledge to Promote Development', Berlin (Dec. 2007). Jack Hayes presented parts of this article at the annual Canadian Asian Studies Association meeting, Edmonton (Oct. 2005) and 2008 Beijing Seminar on Tibetan Studies. The authors would like to thank the organizers and participants of these conferences for their useful comments.

<sup>(2)</sup> See Map (Fig. 1). On Shar khog and its Tibetan inhabitants, the Shar ba or 'people of the east', prior to Chinese occupation in 1958, see the ethnohistorical account written by Karmay & Sagant 1998. On Bon monastic revival in Shar khog, see Schrepf 2001.

<sup>(3)</sup> Shar Dung ri's importance as a sacred Bon site has been entirely replaced by Chinese tourism since its mid 1980s transformation into the 'Huanglong nature reserve'. On this process and the history of another tourist attraction, the Long March memorial situated at the entrance road to Huanglong, see Huber 2006.

<sup>(4)</sup> <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndydb/1999/01/d5-a0bf.a16.html>

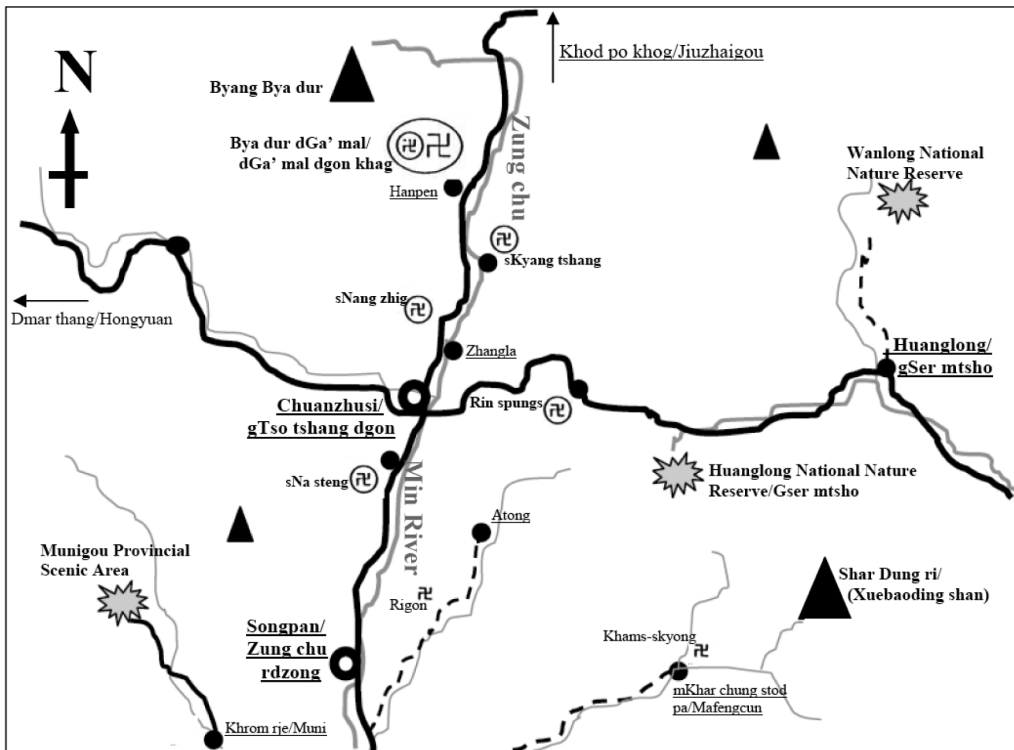


Fig. 1 - Map of Songpan town and Sharkhog's villages and Bon monasteries to the north.

pilgrimage sites of Emei Shan and Leshan located to the south of Chengdu, with the famous Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong Nature Reserves situated in the Tibetan areas of Khod po khog and Shar khog respectively, together with river rafting, hiking along ancient mountain paths, and trips to areas rich in flora and fauna. As a result of this tourism drive, by 2004 Songpan town and tourist hot spots in Shar khog, commonly known among both Chinese and Tibetans as Chuanzhusi (Tib. gTso tshang dgon) and Huanglong (Tib. gSer mtsho), were serving over 500,000 guests per year <sup>(5)</sup>.

The cultural politics of place name changes from Tibetan into Chinese in these (and other) areas populated by a majority of ethnic Tibetans in China represent and symbolize the transformative politics of place-making through tourism orchestrated by the Chinese state. Thus, for the following reasons we intentionally use *either* Tibetan *or* Chinese place names in the first instance with their respective Chinese or Tibetan alternative form in

<sup>(5)</sup> Songpan itself received over 210,000 overnight hotel stays, and over 70,000 of these were foreign tourists. For 2004, this entailed tourism revenue for fees, hotel stays, tickets, food and associated tourism monies in excess of 99 million Yuan (*Songpan Xian Jingji Ziliao* 2005: 3).



parentheses afterwards <sup>(6)</sup>. We prioritize the use of Chinese names for those places that are commonly known and used as such also by Tibetans *and* have been transformed into designated urban ‘cultural’ or natural ‘scenic places’ through state policies. They have thus become visibly and structurally transformed in a Chinese way. Next to Songpan town, in Shar khog proper, this concerns the small town of Chuanzhusi (Tib. gTso tshang dgon) where several major tourist hotels and many tourism services are located, as well as the national nature reserves of Huanglong (Tib. gSer mtsho) and Jiuzhaigou (Tib. gZi rtsa sde dgu) <sup>(7)</sup>. On the other hand, we have intentionally maintained Tibetan place and monasteries’ names in the area north of Songpan town known as Shar khog (and put their Chinese names in brackets) since they either still maintain their primarily Tibetan cultural character as villages or monasteries and/or are only voluntarily and privately involved in the tourist business rather than residing in a designated tourist space. Although this distinction might appear superficial rather than analytical – since it can not do justice to the complexities of reality – we hope to show why it makes sense to differentiate between different forms of tourism in this area and how people engage in it in various, sometimes conflicted and contested ways.

Songpan’s regional tourist development started with the parallel designation of gZi rtsa sde dgu and gSer mtsho as the Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong World Natural Heritage ‘Scenic Sites’ in the mid 1980s. Among the twelve ‘world natural and cultural heritage sites’ in China, four of them are situated in Sichuan Province. The latter include the important Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage mountain of Emei Shan and the giant Buddha of Leshan, as well as the beautiful nature parks Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong. Already in the early 1990s, Han Chinese tourists, both domestic and foreign, preferred the organized tour bus routes, while Western tourists were more interested in individual nature experience, in particular horse trekking into the mountains surrounding Songpan (see Hayes 2006).

In this article, we outline the major developments of the tourism industry in Songpan and Shar khog since the mid 1990s, and explore how local Tibetans are engaging in this rapid change. The analysis of particular ideological and distributive outcomes and the ever-shifting political and economic ground that Tibetans face in the area makes evident that the government organization and administration of an expanding tourism sector have generated income and jobs as well as a new set of problems. This paper analyses and contrasts urban and rural tourism development, and in particular highlights why

<sup>(6)</sup> This is a complicated subject and there is little clarity in how Tibetan place names are spelled. As a reference, the Chinese-Tibetan Placename Gazetteer of Songpan County (*Sichuan Sheng Aba Zangzu Zizhizhou Songpan Xian Diminglu* 1983) is quite useful.

<sup>(7)</sup> See Fig. 1. Even though gZi rtsa sde dgu lies outside of Shar khog in Khod po khog, today’s Nanping County, it is connected with Huanglong and Songpan through tourist bus routes. Most likely, Jiuzhaigou is a Chinese phonetic rendering of the Tibetan gZi rtsa sde dgu (‘Nine Villages of the descendants of the gZi clan’) (Tsering Thar 2003: 643). On the impact of tourism there, in particular on pilgrimage practices and the local Tibetan population, see Peng Wenbin 1998.

and how local Bon monasteries started to engage in tourism, and what kinds of conflicts arose between lay and monastic interests, local and official bodies.

### *Theoretical Considerations: Tourism and Ethnicity*

In addressing tourism, political and cultural issues in China's Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces, both Tim Oakes and Åshild Kolås highlight the importance and power of the state and its mechanisms in producing political and economic outcomes in ethnic tourism (see Oakes 1998; Kolås 2005: 203-205). Oakes emphasizes how ethnic tourism and mechanisms to develop tourist areas in Guizhou help to both civilize the 'tourees', and to respond to official calls for correct notions and practices; a state-led 'construction' of authenticity in tourism and 'modern practices' among ethnic groups that build on the imaginary of the modernist nation-state and entrepreneurial capitalism (Oakes 1998: 26-27, 45-46). Kolås discusses the same issues in northern Yunnan with the construction of the imaginary of 'Shangrila' as part of the Chinese nation-state, as well as the methods of profiteering in cultural commodification (Kolås 2005: 204-205; cf. Schrepf 2008). Both Oakes and Kolås discuss Tibetan culture and identity, and touch on the ecological environment as part of this economic and political process, but in neither case do they disaggregate how local ecological and cultural landscapes as well as peoples' engagement (both urban and rural) in religious practices or to sites and official and unofficial tourism-based ethnic commodification are directly linked. It is just such a link that we hope to demonstrate for the Songpan region. Some Chinese authors have interpreted the socio-cultural and spatial transformation of tourist locales and the environment in western China as a result of the intrusion of global markets and as appropriate state actions to alleviate poverty; inexorable forces that locals were both unable and often unwilling to resist<sup>(8)</sup>. We believe that the local socio-political, religious and environmental landscapes, *and their linkages*, are more complicated than that, and have tried to include local Tibetan agency and problems evolving out of disparate power relations between local and official agencies.

As Pal Nyiri has shown, tourism in northern Sichuan has grown tremendously since the early 1990s, and was a firmly established element of domestic and international urban consumer lifestyle by the beginning of the twenty-first century in China (Nyiri 2005). Part of this tourist framework, Oakes argues, is that 'tourees' – local Han, Tibetans, and Hui – are as much a part of the tourism regime as visitors (Oakes 1998: 26-27; Hayes 2008: 297-98). In particular, the architectural and environmental transformations of space are the foundation on which the tourism regime is built on. In order for Songpan County to be transformed into a tourist space, it had to convert economic and socio-cultural local spaces into national spaces of civilization to truly fit

<sup>(8)</sup> Duan & Yang 2001. See also Li 2003: 335-37 for background on material civilization, the environment and local ethnic cultures in development programs.

into the modern state-led 'touristic models' (Oakes 1998: 10-11, 84-85). Yet at the same time, local people have helped to shape the nature of these models – not just through participating in the tourism industry, but also in shaping the nature of locally appropriate tourism sites. The ideal of the consumer-citizen was implicit in the State Council's 1993 'Opinion on Actively Developing the Domestic Tourism Industry' which declared that 'the emergence and development of a domestic tourism industry has satisfied the popular masses' demand for material culture, which grows day by day, and strengthens the popular masses 'patriotic cohesion'. Chinese officials often state that tourism is supposed to 'synthesize the material and spiritual civilization' <sup>(9)</sup>. Thus, Chinese authorities see the correctly framed consumption (and construction) of places as an instrument of strengthening national consciousness, while local people help to physically shape the nature of tourism's local consumption of space <sup>(10)</sup>.

Today's reality of Songpan's tourism industry is characterized by masses of tourists spit out by tour buses that head for scenic and cultural sites and occasional performances of a pre-conceived minority culture of *zangzu*, the Tibetans, that, despite their variety in social structure and local histories, are generically constructed and represented as a *minzu* – as 'one' of the fifty-six nationalities of China. Looking like giant insects, these buses also dominate the major roads of the valley of Shar khog during the summer season. Huge sign posts and posters with advertisements, economic progress, and environmental protection slogans characterize a highway that now dominates this Tibetan farming area with its oversized gas stations and hotels. In the past, the Shar ba Tibetans played a key role in the development of this Sino-Tibetan frontier zone, by trading lowland Chinese food and luxury goods in exchange for Tibetan nomadic products from the Tibetan Plateau, yet this exchange did little to transform local Tibetan culture. However, the dramatic ruptures of the Cultural Revolution eroded Tibetan society in the region, and Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the 1980s have caused other kinds of dislocations. Since the 1980s, Tibetan cultural and religious activities and sites have been revived mostly by locals themselves, including a bilingual Tibetan middle school established by private donors (Upton 1996). The biggest visible and possibly social transformations, however, started with the new organizational and infrastructure development paving the roads for tourist development in this area.

Back in the late 1980s and early '90s, narrow and muddy roads used to slow down much smaller Chinese tour buses. Often, the main road along the steep Zung chu (Ch. Minjiang) Valley between Wenchuan, Maowen and Songpan was additionally blocked by rock slides and occasional flooding. Inside the valley of Shar khog, between Songpan, Huanglong and Chuanzhusi, and along the main river, the

<sup>(9)</sup> According Lin Yanzhao (1998: 52) and Xiong & Zhao (1998: 35) national, regional and local officials became the 'culture brokers' that determined the how and why of cultural commodification at the local level.

<sup>(10)</sup> Many nature reserves and ethnic cultural areas are furthermore designated 'Patriotic Education Sites' to which schoolchildren are taken. See Woronov 2004: 303-307, and Murphey 2004.

then unpaved road became so muddy in summer that buses and trucks regularly got stuck, sometimes causing a traffic jam of several kilometers – not exactly ideal conditions for tourist sites. Thus, from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s, the Tibetan area north of Songpan with its small villages (c. 60-80 families per village in 1996) and local monasteries (roughly between 40 and 80 monks per monastery with varying study groups and annual ritual performances) remained relatively unknown and untouched by the majority of tourist businesses. Where tourism did take place was concentrated along the main highway, and in the two ‘official’ eco-ethnic tourist spots of Songpan and Huanglong. However, by the late 1990s, tourism in the region was growing by leaps and bounds.

In 1998, the Prefecture Tourism Department issued a document detailing their plans for the development of tourism in Aba (Tib. rNga ba) Prefecture, and the Songpan region in particular (Sichuan Provincial Urban and Rural Planning Institute 1998). Among the main challenges were to improve infrastructure, to compete for talented business managers in the service sector, to compete with other areas of Sichuan in developing tourism, and the need to raise awareness about the importance of tourism among the ‘staff of all government departments and people of all professions’. Finally, the document described the sustainable development of natural resources as a ‘serious challenge’ for tourism. Possible depletion of and conflict over both natural and cultural resources was not mentioned in this report, probably because of lack of awareness and hence concern about ‘cultural commodification’. As with other later influential studies of tourism in northern Sichuan, the issue of cultural commodification, problems with land expropriation and businesses for development, and discussions of cultural sensitivity were entirely lacking <sup>(11)</sup>.

### *Official Tourism Development in Songpan County*

Tourism was and is big business in China, and has been developed for rural populations as a way to combat severe poverty, especially among Tibetans and other ethnic minorities <sup>(12)</sup>. While minority areas experienced less domestic and foreign tourism than coastal, central and urban China, the importance of tourism has grown significantly <sup>(13)</sup>. Tourism to western China began to take off in the early-1980s and

<sup>(11)</sup> See, for example, Yang’s studies of tourism and tourism development in northern Sichuan based on research done between 1992 and 2003 (2003: 139-41).

<sup>(12)</sup> By the turn of the century, earnings from domestic tourism (about 90% of all tourism in 2000) reached 317 billion RMB, while foreign exchange from overseas tourists totaled more than 16 billion US dollars. See Ran & Ou 2000: 337-38, 391-92; World Tourism Organization 2000: 58-59.

<sup>(13)</sup> In the northern counties of Sichuan Province 1998-2000, tourism revenue reached between 10%-15% of local GDP of Tibetan areas, while taxes and profits amounted to over 15% of local revenue, and from 2000-2005 reached 15-20% GDP and 20%+ of local revenue. Local statistics provided by Songpan County Office of Statistics. See, also, Ran & Ou 2000: 339-41 and *Zhongguo Minzu Nianjian* 1997: 373.

the Songpan region was first opened to domestic and limited foreign tourism in 1984<sup>(14)</sup>. However, Songpan County saw less of this early development than neighboring counties until 1999-2000<sup>(15)</sup>.

The Songpan region and parts of western Sichuan were designated as special tourist and cultural economic zones of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in 1999 (Liu 2003). The 2001 State Council resolution 'On Further Accelerating the Development of the Tourism Sector' called for the establishment of these 'experimental zones for poverty alleviation through tourism' (Ch. *Luyou fupin shiyanqu*) as well as the construction of new airports and roads (Wei 2002). The Committee on Nationalities and Religions of the People's Consultative Conference also joined the tourism bandwagon by issuing a 'Proposal to accelerate the development of the tourism sector in nationality areas' that gave local temples a new lease on life to rebuild, refurbish, and otherwise expand their local holdings<sup>(16)</sup>. These special economic zones were developed as administrative entities with major seed funding from richer areas along the Yangtze River and eastern China. In Songpan County, these funds helped to create new infrastructure to support tourist activities, help local Tibetans rebuild and refurbish local Bon and Buddhist monasteries as tourist sites, and expand and market targeted locations of national, ecological and historic significance<sup>(17)</sup>.

### *Urban and Infrastructure Development*

In order to better serve the needs of the growing tourism industry and other potential pastoral and agricultural development projects, the state targeted and invested heavily in infrastructure and highway construction as it started to develop the region (Li et al. 2002: 297-306, 335-36; Li 2003: 362-64; Liu 2003: 254-57). In Songpan County, the highway leading to Jiuzhaigou was the only fully upgraded road for tourism and economic transport until 2004. In fall of 2004, the Sichuan Construction Ministry, in conjunction with the National Bureau of Construction,

<sup>(14)</sup> See *Songpan Xianzhi* 1999: 854-56. This was linked to a wider, rapid expansion of Chinese domestic and foreign tourism building since the mid 1990s. See Wen & Tisdell 2001: 2.

<sup>(15)</sup> Tourism revenue increased in Songpan County tenfold between 1996-2002, when it exceeded 250 million RMB (around \$28 million US) and became one of the largest sectors in the local economy. The growth was in large part related to the marketing and popularity of neighboring Jiuzhaigou, but Huanglong, Chuanzhushi, and Songpan together served over 440,000 guests in 2002. After the airport in Chuanzhushi opened, visitors to Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong doubled (from approximately 1 million in 2003 to 1,95 million in 2004). See Yang 2003: 237; Kang 2005; Dombroski, forthcoming. See, also, Lindberg et al. 2003: 121-22 for basic visitor and tax receipt statistics on Jiuzhaigou Nature Reserve and tourism in Jiuzhaigou County.

<sup>(16)</sup> Ran & Ou 2000: 393-402. This process started in the early '90s, but was vastly expanded in 1999-2000. See for example, Tang et al. 1990: 159; Wei 2000: 127; Fang 2002; Huber 2002: 117-18.

<sup>(17)</sup> Liu (2003: 253-58) and Li (2003: 359-74) elaborate specific programs and goals.

invested over 1 Billion RMB in upgrading the North Sichuan-Gansu Highway (as well as the Jiuzhaigou spur into the newly minted Jiuzhaigou County). They also built a major airport in Shar khog near the Tibetan village of sKyang tshang (Ch. Shanba), called 'Huang-Jiu National Airport', to service those tourists interested in flying into Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong Nature Reserves rather than taking the eight to ten hour bus ride from Chengdu. However, almost all of the subsidiary roads in the county beyond the main highway remain either gravel or dirt tracks prone to landslides, washouts, and seasonal closure. The road to Huanglong Nature Reserve was only fully upgraded to semi-paved and heavy gravel in 2005, and dMu dge (Mao'ergai xiang) road from Zhengjiang to Mao'ergai is still largely unimproved from its *c.* 1978 dirt and gravel surface. In early 'Opening of the West' campaign proposals, the primary roads in the Songpan region were supposed to be upgraded to support both tourism and the expansion of local pastoral industry (Li 2003: 362, 372; Ran & Ou 2000: 112-18). However, road infrastructure development has almost totally concentrated on the Chengdu-Huanglong-Jiuzhaigou tourist circuit, building and upgrading the airport outside of Chuanzhusi, and upgrading the road connections to tourist sites in the counties of Ruo'er gai (Tib. rDzo dge) and Hongyuan (Tib. rMe ba or dMar thang rdzong). This then created the contemporary Chengdu-Songpan-Jiuzhaigou-Ruo'er gai-Ma'erkang tourist circuit <sup>(18)</sup>.

At the same time, county and provincial officials embarked on a large-scale development campaign to reshape the nature of the increasingly popular tourist and 'eco-environmental' Songpan region. Infrastructure development did not only include roads and airports, but a marketing campaign for the region as well. Speaking of 'ethno-ecological tourism' in 2000, the Deputy Director of the Sichuan Provincial Tourism Bureau stated: 'The construction of scenic spots and scenic areas must both fully reflect modern material civilization and fully display the positive and advancing spiritual civilization of the Chinese race. Indeed, this is what distinguishes the socialist tourism industry with Chinese characteristics from Western capitalist tourism industry' (Zhang 2000: 121). Thus, between 2002 and 2005, local and prefecture officials went on an infrastructure development spree to reshape the nature of tourism targeted towns, businesses and even monasteries in order to make tourism 'pay' in Songpan.

Practical infrastructure aside, marketing and market branding helped in this process. In 2002, for example, the tourism bureau of Sichuan province organized the 'Huanglong Culture and Tourism Festival in Huanglong Scenic and Historic Interest Area' as the first grand Tibetan folk-culture tourism festival of the region. Famous modern Tibetan singers were invited, including Ya Dong and Han Hong (a singer of Tibetan-Han descent). A 'local flavor' was added with a series of dances

<sup>(18)</sup> The greater emphasis on roads as serving tourism development needs is best seen in Ran Guangrong, Li Tao and Wang Chuan's discussion of tourism industry development from 2000-2003. See Ran et al. 2003: 139-44.



and a parade of local Tibetan and Hui beauties in traditional dress. While some may scoff at the transparent cultural commodification in this kind of tourist media and administrative campaign, the event was actually quite popular among the local population, in particular the younger generation. Curious remains, however, the inclusion of a touristic '*cham*' performance by local monks from Rin spungs monastery depicted on a photograph, apparently taken in the framework of a precursor festival named 'Huanglong Temple Fair' during a staged and once-off photo session<sup>(19)</sup>. When asked in 1996, monks from Rin spungs monastery had denied any involvement in '*cham*' performances for touristic purposes.

### *The Urban and Rural Tourism Divide*

Since 2000 Songpan County tourism development is divided between two kinds of tourism models – one that highlights a kind of local national-urban culture (Ch. *fang gujie*), and another that highlights local rural ethnic culture (Ch. *bendi fengjing*). To begin with, the most visible signs of Songpan's 'touristic modernity', at least the initial ones, were not found in rural villages of Songpan County but in urban areas along the Min River in or near Songpan and Chuanzhusi. One aspect of the poverty alleviation and development projects of the 1990s was the creation of economic development zones in the major towns slated for tourist development; however, these zones had to be recreated and promoted in such a way that they would have what Wei Xiaolan called 'ethnic form [but] modernized content' (Wei 2000: 139).

Over five years of intense demolition, construction, and urban-tourism-environment planning, Songpan town's spaces have been 'nationalized' and its inhabitants 'civilized' in order to be suitable as a tourist commodity. Songpan officials have also tried to highlight their regional environment by both advertising it in town as well as link local tours to natural sites. Songpan has been transformed into the standardized category of 'old town' (Ch. *gucheng* or *fangujie*), a touristic genre represented by hundreds of sites across China, from Zhouzhuang near Shanghai to Lijiang in Yunnan (see Oakes 1998: 52; Anagnost 1997: 167-70). The creation of Songpan as an 'old town' started in the late 1980s with the designation of its Ming Dynasty (16th century) wall and three urban temples as state heritage sites and as a part of the Jiuzhaigou tourist route. The *Xibu da kaifa* tourism construction lasted from 2000-2004 (Wei 2000: 128-30; Chen & Wang 2002: 204, 207). In 2002, when Songpan was given additional funds to touristify the city, local and prefecture tourism bureaus and local officials went into construction overdrive<sup>(20)</sup>. Under the aegis of 'infrastructure development', the entire downtown

<sup>(19)</sup> The 'Huanglong Temple Fair' remained part of a tourist myth-making process (see Huber 1998: figs. 10 and 11).

<sup>(20)</sup> After 2002, reconstruction took place in large part and at such a pace when provincial authorities decided to hold the Second Sichuan International Tourism Festival in Songpan and Jiuzhaigou over the course of August and early September in 2004.



Fig. 2 - The 'touristified' north gate of Songpan town. (After Hayes 2006).

was demolished, houses on and around the city wall were destroyed, the wall painted a uniform light grey, and the downtown business district rebuilt in the style reminiscent of architecture in Chengdu and eastern China <sup>(21)</sup>. Equally, local Han Chinese and Hui temples were given a facelift, and an 'ancient Imperial fort' (the pre-2003 version dating from the late 19th century) above the city is also being rebuilt.

After the old town was clearly bounded by the new-Ming Dynasty wall, the border between mundane and touristic space was further defined through gates, pedestals, and wall paintings. The town gates were rebuilt, spotlighted, and old

<sup>(21)</sup> The Tourism Bureau in Songpan County wanted to 'rebuild' a late imperial Ming-Qing town with appropriate houses, businesses, and color. Songpan was actually rebuilt in what Chinese officials term 'Tibet style restoration' (Ch. *zangzu fuyuan*). The building styles in the downtown district, with wood facing and tracery, traditional scalloped roofs, and roof tiles and gables reminiscent of the Forbidden City in Beijing are distinctly Chinese. But the paint façades around lintels and windows were painted in Tibetan patterns; that is, geometrical patterns in shades of ochre, sometimes highlighted with azure blue or malachite green, as well as 'Tibetan style' iron doors. Local Hui Muslims were allowed to paint green and white crescents on their buildings.



Chinese stele were embedded in their interiors. The northern part of Songpan town now has several wide ceremonial spaces, its own little Tiananmen Square, and a standard monument. This monument depicts not a statue of Mao Zedong but the Tang Dynasty Han Chinese princess Wencheng and her Tibetan king-bridegroom Songtsen Gampo with a tablet that states, *Hanzang heqin* – the favorite iconic statement to be seen all over China’s Tibetan areas meaning ‘Han and Tibetan Harmony and Amity’ (Fig. 2).

Finally, the main tourist street through the town was lined with Chinese lanterns and fake and real flower beds familiar from the Wangfujing or Qintailu pedestrian zones in Beijing and Chengdu. In strategic places, large murals of the grasslands with yaks amid tall grass, Huanglong Nature Reserve’s golden pools, small but present ‘Tibetan’ temples, and Xuebaoding (Shar dung ri) Mountain are depicted in vibrant detail. All of these monuments to Han-Tibetan relations, greater China (Beijing and all), the surrounding natural environment and Chinese military occupation of the town in the distant and recent past, identified the town explicitly and implicitly as part of the Chinese nation and the status of Songpan as an ethnic-environmental and ‘civilized’ part of China. This process has not been without its costs to local people.

In particular, Tibetans in Songpan have had to deal with reconstruction for tourism purposes. With increased tourism in the area, there has also been increased market competition for business space. According to Hayes’ own survey of local businesses, in 2000, over half were owned by local Tibetans. Hui owned about 15% and Han Chinese about 37% (Table 1). In 2005, however, after the ‘Opening of the West’ campaign was implemented locally, and after Songpan’s major reconstruction, Han Chinese owned 57% of businesses, Hui owned 27% and Tibetans only owned 14% (22). Tibetans explained that they were priced out of their former locations by

Privately Owned Businesses on Jin’an Street, Downtown Songpan:  
Owners’ Ethnicity and Change Over Time\*

2000	Number	Percent	2005	Number	Percent
Tibetan	19	50	Tibetan	7	14.7
Han	14	37	Han	27	57.4
Hui	5	13	Hui	13	27.7
Total	38	100	Total	47	98.8

Table 1. Business ownership changes in Songpan (2000-2005). After Hayes 2008.

\* This does not include two state-owned enterprises or banks.

(22) The shift in business ownership noted above is particularly telling considering the overall ethnic composition of Songpan county’s population. In 2005, out of a total population of 69,613 Tibetans made up 42.2%, Han Chinese 33.2% and Hui 15.1% (*Aba Zhouzhi Nianjian* 2006: 386).

more connected and wealthy Han Chinese from the Chengdu plain and beyond because of rising rent. Local Hui had more businesses, but they were also priced out of the downtown area dominating one area of northern Songpan in a kind of Hui quarter of town. These changes in business ownership have caused some very significant local tensions that are unlikely to change – and not just between Tibetans and Han, but among all three nationalities<sup>(23)</sup>.

Yet Songpan now has a global face with Chinese characteristics, a ‘night life’ for tourists and young locals in summer, internet cafes, and restaurants with international food and clientele, including a familiar (if somewhat shiny) ‘old-China’ flair. Whereas before 1999 Songpan might have appeared in only few Western tour guide books, usually as a trekking site for Western tourists, it has been successfully remodeled as an official tourist site, and has been officially thus re-inaugurated as such in 2005, as well as placed on all of the domestic tourist itineraries into the Songpan-Jiuzhaigou region. Yet, nowhere are there traces of the local history of the place to be seen, such as that Tibetans raided and burnt parts of Songpan three times in the 20th century alone (cf. Schrempf 2006). But for touristic purposes, the surface of urban Songpan is only part of the tourist experience. In addition to the physical resurfacing of infrastructure and Songpan town itself, two other primarily urban, local tourist commodities are important for the region.

Songpan was historically home to a variety of goods that were trekked to Chengdu and beyond. The chief historical exports were traditional medicine plants, animal products, and horses. Since the mid 1990s, these and other goods have come to be defined as ‘brand name’ products of Songpan County. Brand names have been created for local products and practices that are sold locally and nationally to promote interest in northern Sichuan by the Sichuan Songpan County Huanglong Tourism Market Development Company<sup>(24)</sup>. These products include local teas,

<sup>(23)</sup> While opening new businesses in a normal market setting is neither a surprise nor particularly harmful to the local economy in general, it is problematic in some respects for Songpan Tibetans. In the 1990s, many locals enjoyed the fruits of increasing tourism to the area by selling locally produced goods. Tibetans dominated the most accessible local open-air market, and were at least equal in numbers to Hui and Han merchant stores combined. After 2000, a shift began in favor of Han and Hui merchants, and after 2002, many of the Tibetans were forced out of the store business altogether. With this shift, the move towards importing goods to be sold as local cultural commodities increased markedly. Fewer local Tibetans are producing goods for sale to tourists, and have found themselves pursuing more traditional agro-pastoral pursuits, or moving from the area altogether. In other Tibetan areas of China, there was and is serious resentment toward migrant business people. While in 2005, Hayes found few examples of local resentment towards migrant business people, he did not conduct formal interviews on the subject. Cf. Tibet Information Network, ‘Rebuilding and Renovation in Lhasa’, *Special Report of the Tibet Information Network* (2002), [www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2002/1009.htm](http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2002/1009.htm) (accessed August 2005); Peters 2001.

<sup>(24)</sup> This company, a township village enterprise started in 1988, now dominates local production of goods for tourist resale. Other companies in Chengdu, Wuhan, and Shanghai also sell goods marketed as Songpan, Xueshan (Snowy Mountains), and Huanglong-Jiuzhaigou originals. *Songpan Xianzhi* 1999: 486-88; Yang 2002: 20-25.

traditional Tibetan and Chinese medicinal plants, and animals products like *songbei* (a fritillary bulb of alpine grass), *chongcai* (caterpillar fungus), deer musk, prickly ash bark, various mushrooms, local pepper, wild honey, wool products, felted yak hair, and dried yak meat. As a local tourism official stated, these '[...] superior aspects of traditional cultural knowledge of the Tibetans and Hui directly create social wealth so as to increase social productivity and play positive roles in the sustainable development of the whole society [Ch. *duo guojia*]. So we must fully recognize and grasp the superior aspects of the traditional cultural knowledge of local nationalities and exploit it [Ch. *kaifa liyong*]' (25).

These local products are now touted as the 'primary' products of the county, important for export purposes and the tourism industry. Processing and sales are staffed and run predominantly by local Tibetans in the businesses formerly organized as collectives. One local industry cooperative, prior to 1996 known as the Songpan County Market Development Company (part of the old county forestry bureau), now called the Sichuan Songpan County Huanglong Tourism Market Development Company, buys these goods from locals, processes them, and markets them in the county pharmacies. It ships processed and packaged medicinal herbs to Chengdu and elsewhere. Nearly every business catering to tourists, and many that do not, displays these goods labeled with the development company's name. While not all local Tibetans share in the fruits of this touristic labor, many of them do indeed profit, because these producers used to be formal collectives, and engage many local businesses, local people, and the local government. Of course, while some Tibetans work for and profit from former collectives, this does not mean that all local businesses sharing in the tourism boom are particularly culturally sensitive. For example, a meat factory selling their products in Songpan town, had been established right next to dGa' mal monastery, at the foot of the sacred mountain of Byang Bya dur, also the gate to a pilgrimage path that is still used by the local Bon population. This transgression of their ritual-social-moral space also hurt the cultural and religious sensitivities of the Bon po. In 2002, some kept saying, 'There is no religion in this valley practiced anymore' (26).

Nevertheless, some revenues of local tourism businesses in the county were endowed with more cultural sensibility. Thus, the initiatives of two horse trekking companies have contributed tremendously to the popularity of Songpan with foreigners – not the result of state planning, but rather of local entrepreneurship, as even the deputy head of the County Tourism Board admitted. Guo Shang, the general manager of Shunjiang Horse Treks claims he started the business in 1987 to cater to Israeli and Swiss students who had come from Beijing to see the local scenery and go horseback riding. The horse trekking companies now employ over 70

(25) Interview by Hayes (May 2005).

(26) Informal talks by Schrempf with Shar ba in 2002.

guides with their horses <sup>(27)</sup>. Numbers have grown steadily over the past fifteen years, and have spawned a whole service sector for domestic and international tourists on the northern end of the city, and as well in a number of local villages and the two nature reserves. Guides take people to see the scenery, experience Tibetan culture, and ride and climb local mountains. Part of the overall redevelopment of Songpan town was to make certain services, like the horse trekking and tourist housing, more viable and visible to people on inbound buses. By 2004-2005, the local horse trekking company, using redevelopment funds in part, had opened a large hotel in the new bus station, expanded several existing hostels, and opened or redeveloped a number of local restaurants.

While it is important to note that some tourism developments have been well received by local Tibetans, others have not. Horse trekking and some local medicinal herb shops have done well and are respected both locally and abroad for their business and marketing acumen. At the same time, the redevelopment schemes of downtown Songpan have caused their own set of strong ethnic tensions. Yet these tensions have really only reached local town dwellers. It has been in the rural tourism development, particularly monastic tourism, that some of the greatest ethnic and organizational tensions have come to the fore.

#### *Bon Monasteries and Monastic Revival in Shar khog*

Before the year 2000, and apart from local Tibetan villagers – lay sponsors and monks studying or practicing rituals – neither outsiders nor tourists took hardly any interest in these small Bon monasteries. The Bon monasteries had been rebuilt after the 1980s with labor and financial support by the local village population (Tib. *lha sde*) and with initial support from the local government. Annual monastic festivals attracted considerable numbers of lay audience and sponsors (Fig. 3), yet already back in 1996, the manager of the biggest Bon monastery of dGa' mal dgon khag (pronounced 'Gamel Gingka', alias dGa' mal gShen bstan kun khyab bde chen gling; Ch. Gamisi) was complaining about declining lay support and the government's increasing pressure on monasteries to generate their own income rather than to rely on lay peoples' donations, as was traditionally the case. As it turned out, religious politics are quite complicated in this valley and also added to local tensions.

dGa' mal dgon khag was both a re-invention of Bon monastic revival (cf. Schrempf 2000, 2001) and an innovative way by the government to centralize

<sup>(27)</sup> In 2002-2003 this local industry brought over 2,700 tourists to the county. The local Shunjiang Horse Trekking Company estimated that it brought 4,000 tourists in 2004. These statistics shift dramatically depending on who one talks to in Songpan. According to the county tourism bureau, the horse trekking company brings in a steady 2000 people a year and all of the guides are either Hui or Tibetan; however, having spoken to the current and previous owners and the guides themselves the numbers I noted above seem to reflect reality.



Fig. 3 - The *sprul sku* of sNang zhig monastery gives a public blessing. The victory banners hanging at the temple facade symbolize local lay sponsorship of 700 Yuan each. (Photo by M. Schrempf 1996).

control of the small monasteries. At the site of the old dGa' mal monastery (dGa' mal gYung drung dar rgyas gling) which had been rebuilt like most of the other Bon monasteries in the area in the beginning of the 1980s, an altogether new monastery had been constructed. It was to serve as a unifying symbol and focused location for Bon religion. Before 1958, this federation had existed only through ritual rotation of its otherwise autonomous member monasteries, centering on annual ritual dances ('*cham*). The latter were – and still are – an important occasion for demonstrating lay support to the monastery<sup>(28)</sup>. dGa' mal dgon khag thus seemed to materialize an old wish of the Shar ba, the Tibetans from Shar khog of whom about 95% are followers of Bon, for a Bon monastic centre to strengthen their power vis-à-vis their much stronger Buddhist (in particular dGe lugs pa) monastic neighbors in dMu dge (Ch. Mao'er gai) or Bla brang (Ch. Xiahe). However, with its creation, this new monastic centre came under focused scrutiny of the Songpan County Religious

<sup>(28)</sup> Interestingly, the ritual masked dances called '*cham* performed annually at certain times according to monastic calendars were the main time for collecting donations – which would usually, together with the money earned for performing individual rituals, cover the annual monastic economy (Schrempf 2000, 2001).



Affairs Office and other state institutions. dGa' mal dgon khag, locally also called the 'new' dGa' mal, became the only Bon monastery with an abbot and his manager who were directly made responsible for all Bon religious activities in the valley.

Back in 1996, the rotational duty to participate in the annual ritual dances happening at the site of dGa' mal dgon khag, that required the active – financial and labor – support by both monk and lay populations among the five Bon monasteries did not work well anymore. The strong antagonism and competition between the two dGa' mal monasteries for lay and monk participation as well as for some occasional tourists deepened. Part of the reason might have laid in the fact that the new federated monastery and the rebuilt 'old' dGa' mal were constructed at a distance of 50 m next to each other, and had their major annual rituals happening at almost the same time<sup>(29)</sup>. However, in contrast to 'old' dGa' mal's authorities, the manager of 'new' dGa' mal was concerned about the missing local support and was thinking about other solutions. Up to that point, tourists were channeled in bus tours past his monastery to places like Huanglong and Jiuzhaigou. Thus, as a traveler, one needed to walk on foot from Chuanzhusi, catch a taxi (if available at all) or hitch-hike to get a ride on one of the farmer's tractors to get up to the remote place of dGa' mal monastery and the sacred Bon mountain of Byang Bya dur (see also Rossi 2007). Only people with an interest in Bon religion would come occasionally to visit this place. Even the locals themselves living mostly further south in the small villages of Shar khog, found that dGa' mal was too remote for regular visits. In 1996, the manager of 'new' dGa' mal was thinking of producing a ritual dance pamphlet in both Chinese and English for tourists who eventually would pass by. It would take another five years until his wish came true and things changed dramatically in the Shar khog's monasteries.

### *Bon Monasteries Engage in Tourism*

The small rebuilt Bon monasteries of Shar khog are strategically well-situated between Huanglong and Jiuzhaigou in an area designated by the tourist bureau as an official tourist place. Since 2000, more than half of altogether six Bon monasteries of the Zung chu valley north of Songpan engage in tourism. Official opening hours of the monasteries (excluding Tibetan holidays), fees and accounting are under the control of the Songpan County Religious Affairs Office, while the democratic management committees of each monastery, in particular the manager is responsible for local accounting. dGa' mal was the first monastic place in the area that was leased for five years to a Chinese tourist agency. The latter actively recruited willing monastic officials to engage in leasing contracts.

<sup>(29)</sup> dGa' mal dgon khag's support was shrinking among the local monk and lay population – one could imagine that they did not want to support a new monastic centre, because of its connection to the government. Possibly, because these five monasteries were always very individualistic, and did not want to be ruled, not even by one of their own.

However, when one searches the internet for English language tour advertisements around Songpan, the small Tibetan monasteries of Shar khog are not mentioned. Even today, they remain awkwardly 'invisible' in glossy tourist media and in comparison to the well-known and long established pilgrimage and tourist sites of Xiahe/Labrang, the so-called most important monastery of Amdo Tibetan areas. And – in contrast to Labrang – the Bon monasteries of Songpan seemed to have great difficulties in really profiting from the tourist business – at least their involvement became a highly controversial local affair. While Labrang had always been a centre for visitors – whether pilgrims, monks from outside or tourists – in Shar khog's monasteries, tourism seemed like a bush fire triggering rapid change in the environment, controversy over funds within the two dGa' mal monasteries, and also discontent in local peoples' minds. All kinds of economic, political and socio-cultural problems arose between the local population, the management committees of those Tibetan monasteries that engaged in tourism, the Chinese tour agencies, and the local government, which will be detailed below. In summer 2002, both dGa' mal, like all the other local monasteries who had engaged in tourism, were even closed down temporarily. It looked like a desolate place at the time, neither monks nor tourists to be seen, only Chinese advertising banners announcing 'good luck flags' for purchase fluttered across monastic buildings. Behind the two monasteries they covered the lower slopes of the sacred Bon mountain Byang Bya dur in colorful but unusual ways <sup>(30)</sup>.

After the 'Opening of the West' campaign, Chinese tourism agencies who also toured Emei Shan had addressed those Bon monasteries in Shar khog that are situated relatively close to the main tourist road for some business deals. Not all of the monasteries followed the temptation to make easy money and thereby kill two birds with one stone, i.e., to fulfill the state's demand for economic autonomy of monasteries, making money for their own profit, and somehow heighten their public prestige by new monastic buildings. Yet, for example, the *sprul sku* in residence at sNang zhig monastery kindly declined the offer (at least, this was the case in 2002). He was deeply concerned about his monastery's local reputation, confirmed that he had enough lay support already, and also feared that his monks could become distracted if his monastery would join the tourism craze. Looking at what happened to the other monasteries who engaged in it, his fears seem justifiable. The Chinese tour agency offered to lease a monastery for a fixed price of about 80,000 to 100,000 Yuan per year (in 2002 *c.* 10,000 Dollars), renovate some of the monastic buildings or build new ones. In turn, they had the right to bring in their own staff who resided part-time in the monastery. Also, they would keep the money earned from entrance tickets and sell their Chinese Buddhist

<sup>(30)</sup> This, of course, is no Tibetan custom at all but a local invention to make money. In the internet, on a tourist site for Tibetan areas, one can read: 'Tibetans decorate their mountains with colourful flags'.

paraphernalia which they would display in some adjacent buildings next to the monastic courtyard <sup>(31)</sup>.

Furthermore, 'payments' seem to have been made to some officials, in particular to the high ranking monks and the democratic management committees of the monasteries who were interested in the deal: sometimes even monthly salaries were paid, one person even got a car as a present, yet the majority of monks did not receive anything, let alone the villagers with whose support the monasteries had been rebuilt in the first place. A lay villager indirectly commented in 2002 on such monasteries: 'Why would we want to lease our monastery that we build with our own hands to "the Chinese", and let them make the big money? – We were not asked!' Another local layman was deeply concerned, in particular about the presence of young Chinese girls working as tourist guides who would 'pollute' (Tib. *sgrib*) the monastery, since they do not keep to the rules of avoiding monastic grounds when menstruating, like Tibetan women would do <sup>(32)</sup>. However, most older villagers were appalled by the decline of religious activities in the valley that they saw as directly related to increasing tourism activities and 'bad' monks making money. Also, the lax discipline in the monasteries annoyed them, the declining quality or absence of good monastic teachers, as well as the indecent behavior of mobile young monks in public spaces, who loved to ride around on motorbikes and hang out in internet cafes. One lay person was even forced to buy an entrance ticket in order to get access to his own monastery and after refusing to pay was harassed by the police.

Monks from those monasteries who had agreed to lease their place to the tourism agency had a different opinion. They argued that in that way they would not have to deal with Chinese tourists directly – they felt 'inadequate' in terms of their Chinese language and cultural mediation skills towards Han Chinese tourists. However, the monks did not seem concerned about the fact that their monasteries were not presented as belonging to the Bon religion. For example, since in most peoples' minds, Tibetans are Buddhists, they argued, tourists would always circumambulate a 'Tibetan' monastery clockwise – truly a problem for Bon po who circumambulate anti-clockwise. Such incidences had previously happened when small Chinese tourist groups came to visit. In a very clever way, the Chinese tour agencies that were leasing the four Bon monasteries of sNa steng, gTso tshang, sKyang tshang and dGa' mal (at least until summer 2006), got around this potential trap of cultural conflict. They set up big Chinese style incense cauldrons in the middle of the monastery courtyard and placed toilet houses besides. They sold

<sup>(31)</sup> In a like manner, the dGe lugs pa monastery at Shangba (Tib. Ri dgon) and Mao'er gai (Tib. dMud ge) have faced similar issues. See Hayes 2008: 276-78.

<sup>(32)</sup> Yet, this would apply to many female tourists as well, so from that point of view, this would be a general issue of tourism, gender and ethnicity concerning the preservation of purity in Tibetan monasteries (cf. Makley 2007).





Fig. 4 - A young monk waiting for his mate is watching the tourist group having a break at a small tea shop in Khrom je (Ch. Munigou). (Photo by M. Schrempf 2002).

Chinese incense sticks, as well as Chinese Buddhist jade pendants in former monastic buildings next to the courtyard. Tourists needed neither to circumambulate the monasteries in the traditional way (and thus avoid potential trouble with Bon sensibilities), yet they were also led astray as to what kind of sacred place they were actually visiting – this and much more serious transgressions built up to some local fights over rights of ownership, religious authenticity, morality, money making, and the tourist market among the locals.

#### *A Model Tourist Monastery?*

In comparison to the other five Bon monasteries of the dGa' mal dgon khag's federation, gTso tshang monastery was built explicitly as a tourist place. Conveniently situated at the crossroads between Huanglong, Jiuzhaigou, Songpan and Hongyuan (Tib. rMe ba or dMar thang rdzong) – the latter became a touristic grassland spot for a 'true' Tibetan nomadic picnic experience. gTso tshang monastery became a successful tourist attraction of Chuanzhusi, endowed with a very professional outlook. It is located at the place where formerly a branch temple of Rin spungs (Ch. Linbosi) had been situated. In particular, it was claimed to have been a seat (Tib. *gdan sa*) of one the



Fig. 5 - gTso tshang monastery's entrance gate. (Photo by M. Schrempf, summer 2002).

great Bon po sKyang 'phags masters going back to the 12th century (cf. Huber 1998). Today, only a sticker that tourists receive after having paid their entrance fee – allegedly for their ‘safety’ – reminisces of the Bon heritage. In Tibetan it tells the Bon mantra *Om ma tri mu ye sa le 'du*. Otherwise, the gTso tshang monastery, guided by Rin spung's management committee, displays Buddhist thangkas and statues for visiting tourists in their assembly hall. A monk from Rin spung, present and questioned on site in the summer of 2002, replied that this is what tourists are used to – to see and thus recognize Buddhist statues – ‘This makes them happy’, he explained laconically. At the time and instead of tourists, however, it was Chinese tour ‘safety’ guides roaming around on the monastic courtyard who – for alleged reasons of cultural sensitivities – prohibited the taking of photographs on the monastic grounds.

During summer 2002, and after locals had complained to the authorities, all of a sudden the Bon monasteries were closed, except for gTso tshang dgon, which seemed to have worked out a more satisfying deal. Some Tibetan complaints must have finally triggered a response from above. Fights over who actually has the right to receive the entrance fees and in particular over the money put into the donation boxes set up in the temple halls, were brought forward to the government's attention. Were these monies part of the lease rights of the tour agency or should some (or all) go to the monastery in question? Also, it seems, that a ‘spy’ from the tourist office had been



Fig. 6 - The courtyard of gTso tshang monastery in summer 2002. (Photo by M. Schrempf 2002).

witnessing the stories that some tour guides were telling to tourists. They were completely made up and utterly outrageous. An acclaimed Tibetan ‘lama’ offered to ‘bless’ tourists’ jade pendants for money. He had supposedly meditated for three years without food in a solitary place, and thus there was a unique opportunity to get blessed by him. Also, ridiculously high amounts of prices were asked for incense: 60 Yuan for one big stick, and for good luck ‘for yourself’, 100 Yuan for two that includes your family, 150 Yuan for three including all your ancestors. Both the rNga ba Prefecture Tourism and Religious Affairs Offices decided to close the Bon monasteries until the complaints, and resulting tensions based on the business models had been sorted out at least temporarily. The debate has not been resolved, and to the best of our knowledge, local monasteries keep handling this issue differently – some reopened to tourists and others have refrained from doing so <sup>(33)</sup>.

<sup>(33)</sup> It was not really clear why gTso tshang dgon remained open in summer 2002 while the other three Bon monasteries of dGa' mal, sKyang tshang and sNa steng were closed down temporarily (according to data collected during fieldwork by M. Schrempf in 2002). Also, some monastic funds earned through tourism benefited the Religious Affairs Office while others do not. The Tibetan Buddhist monastery of dMu dge, for example, kept its funds within the monastery (based on Hayes’ interviews with local monks in 2006; Hayes 2008: 276).

One final area of tension in the development of tourism in the region, both for monastic centres as well as in general, are the local nature reserves. Huanglong Nature Reserve and Munigou Scenic Area in Khrom rje or Khrim rgyal khog have not only provided local jobs and fees for the county, they have also closed access for locals to areas in and around them. National and regional tourism and environmental protection offices have set up a joint protection-tourism program that has led to a reduction in residents' access to targeted areas in Songpan County (see also Han 2000; Lindberg et al. 1997, 1997b; Xue 1997). In its current form, the existing policy largely limits horse trekking and hiking to four designated areas in the county: the entrance to Huanglong Nature Reserve, entrance to Munigou Scenic Area, to the foot of Xuebaoding (Tib. Shar dung ri), and to an area called the 'little grasslands' of Songpan County, called *xiao caodi* by local Tibetans<sup>(34)</sup>. In both of the nature reserves, access is granted along entrance roads to reach the parks, but not to enter the parks themselves on horseback<sup>(35)</sup>. All four areas have rebuilt Bon or Buddhist temples, licensed shops catering to tourists, established paths that are at least marginally accessible by road. They represent areas that are officially designated in county and provincial plans to 'develop the minority regions of Aba Prefecture', because of accessibility and an existing 'Tibetan cultural heritage'. These development areas and trekking routes are viewed positively, in the sense that local Tibetans in those areas profit more from tourist foot and horse traffic, as well as greater leeway in the development of their local Buddhist and Bon institutions and practice of religion.

However, Tibetans in these developed places and beyond complain that areas accessed by the main highway, and those shared by both Hui and Tibetans, are slated for such development. The regions in which the majority of trekking pursuits take place are still largely owned and managed by the provincial or prefecture government, or are under the purview of collective management – in other words, these areas are not controlled by local individuals or township collectives, but rather by officials appointed by the county, prefecture, or provincial government, with use and programming fees flowing out of the local economy to bureaus and official coffers that support them<sup>(36)</sup>. Thus, further development of trekking routes would

<sup>(34)</sup> Until 2003, horse trekkers could go almost anywhere in the county, including the reserves. According to local regulations in force by 2005 it is illegal to horseback in the reserves, and heavy fines are given to any Tibetans herding their animals on the verge of reserve areas to get to other rangeland areas, or otherwise for trespassing or crossing them state property.

<sup>(35)</sup> This is not a small region as it covers nearly 11% of Songpan County. These areas are not 'under developed', but have been slated as the chief recipients of Songpan County's rural development projects premised on the cultural commodification.

<sup>(36)</sup> Prior to 2003, Munigou Scenic Area directly benefited the local government through tickets and fees, and Huanglong generally helped through subsidiary business receipts, local travel, and hotel

mean that Tibetans would experience further loss of control over their farmlands, and loss of potential revenue from increased areas for trekking.

While it is nearly impossible at this time to estimate an actual income at the monasteries based on local tourism, the overall tourism figures for Songpan County are gathered not only from officially recognized locations, like the local nature reserves, but also from local businesses, horse trekking, and related tourist and eco-tourism. According to county tourism offices, fees and receipts from the local Bon and Buddhist monasteries that are now part of tourism itineraries (including horse trekking) are included in official county statistics<sup>(37)</sup>. Through grassroots tourism organization, like horse trekking and official eco- and leisure tourism in local nature reserves and scenic areas, local income seems to have increased over 40 times between 1990 and 1998 (Fang 2002: 115; Ran & Ou 2000: 341-42). In 2004, the tourism and environmental protection economic regime contributed approximately 30% of Songpan County's revenues (Chen et al. 2004: 76). Thus, the original goals of tourism-poverty alleviation policy and development helped to contribute to the goal of providing local benefits. While achievements of the original goals of the poverty alleviation development and Great Western Development campaigns has provided local benefits, eco- and ethnic tourism, especially linked to monastic tourism, have created new problems directly related to the campaigns' distributive structure.

### *Conclusion*

We conclude that based on our data collected over a period of ten years, between 1996 and 2006, it appears that local Tibetan agency is possible in tourism development yet it is rarely part of state development programs. The latter have shown to rather limit local Tibetan agency and active participation, taking away valuable land through 'environmental protection', and overt control of monastery fees and public spaces. Furthermore, the state's domineering display of a generic minority culture through the building of nationalist

stays. However, it should be noted that Huanglong is a national level nature reserve, and since 2003, Munigou has been incorporated under its operations. Because they are a national level reserve, the ticket receipts, taxes and any other sources of revenue gained from them is not put in county or prefecture hands, but earns money for national and provincial state authorities. For instance, Li and Han (Han 2000) observed that the reserve's monopoly on tourism infrastructure limits the involvement of and benefits accruing to local communities. Of the reserves developing tourism from 1997-2000 (including Huanglong), their survey showed that only 11% generated benefits for more than half of the local households, and approximately 23% did not generate any local economic benefits. Huanglong fell into the first category, but this only goes to show that it was helping only a limited number of people in the county at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

<sup>(37)</sup> Interview by Hayes (May 2005). According to prefecture officials, county offices are required to report these monies; however, Aba Prefecture Tourism Bureau officials have not confirmed if prefecture level statistics on tourism include monastic fees and services in their totals.



architecture and symbols of unity shapes both tourist and local realities, though in quite different ways. The most visible signs of Songpan's 'touristic modernity' are not found in rural villages of Songpan County, at least hardly in those that lie beyond the main road, but in urbanized areas near Songpan and Chuanzhusi, and in the tightly controlled nature reserves in the area. However, many Tibetan households are engaged in tourism in one way or the other, so they are affected by it as well.

One aspect of the state's poverty alleviation and development projects of the 1990s was the creation of economic development zones in the major towns targeted for tourism development; however, these zones had to be recreated and promoted, so that they would have what Wei Xiaolan called 'ethnic form [but] modernized content' (Wei 2000: 139). The example of gTso tshang monastery, which was especially built for touristic purposes, seems to fit that model, while at the same time, it seemed to be the most successful solution, when compared to the other local monasteries engaging in tourism. While gTso tshang certainly profited from its urban situation, it also seemed more 'assimilated' in terms of how a 'Tibetan' (and not an authentic Bon) monastery should look like, given its overboarding Chinese style entrance gate, and Buddhist statues. Its transformed outlook and content was certainly no coincidence.

Yet, agency lies with locals who can intentionally commodify their culture without necessarily changing their beliefs. The curious absence of any of these small monasteries from official development plans as well as the media allows for several questions that still need to be answered. Monasteries are of course the affair of the respective Religious Affairs Office, thus they need to control their particular interest and domain vis-à-vis the tourism office. That might be one of the reasons why the monastic tourist enterprises remained rather unofficial, based on private deals between Chinese entrepreneurs and the local democratic management committees, while the potential profit remained in control of the Religious Affairs Office.

Local Tibetan agency is also expressed in the intentional refusal of some monasteries to engage with tourism altogether, knowing that it has the potential to destroy the very basis of Tibetan monasticism, including the maintenance of celibate life, monks' study and meditation – and thereby lay support. Clearly those monasteries who refrained from tourism are now the ones with the biggest study groups and functioning lay support. Also, many Tibetans have profited from building houses in Songpan and Chuanzhusi, leasing them to Han and Hui entrepreneurs, or have opened up souvenir shops. Thus, in urban areas, for private entrepreneurs (shop owners) and for some grassroots businesses, such as the trekking companies, tourism means a real boom. On the other hand, there seems to be a clear and rather alarming shift in business ownership in Songpan town moving towards more Han and less Tibetan entrepreneurs in recent years. According to local Tibetans, there also had been a marked in-migration of Han Chinese

happening since 2000 that might have simply outnumbered previous Tibetan ownership by buying them up. Nowadays, the conditions that need to be met for opening up a private tourist agency, for example, are almost impossible to achieve – they require very high capital investments, excellent knowledge of Chinese language, and above all, *guanxi* with local officials and regional tourism offices and companies.

While the GDP has officially more than doubled in Songpan over the past decade, it remains a question who is really profiting from tourism business, and how much this is due to government policies and Chinese enterprises. As we have shown, there is a very large urban-rural divide in making profit, and in the rural setting, there is much less ability for local stakeholders, especially for monasteries, to really make a profit for themselves.

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