

where governmentalities “rely on the ‘promotion of happiness’ and other positive affects, often imposed on the actual feelings of Chinese citizens, such as resentment, depression and anger” (p. 244)? If the dominant register of youth culture is “positive energy,” and where the collective expression of negative feelings, for example the ironic nihilism of the *sang* 丧 online subculture, is interpreted as threatening, what effect does such circumscription have on the ability of youth cultures to be performed or asserted in spaces where there is increasingly ubiquitous surveillance?

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*Heritage and Romantic Consumption in China*

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Linking the themes of heritage conservation, ethnic tourism and youthful desires for romantic escape from the pressures of urban life implies a welcome disruption to the standard value-laden binary between the idea of “authentic” heritage conservation and its vulgar commercialization for mass appeal. Based on 17 months’ fieldwork between 2006 and 2011, Zhu weaves these themes into a focus on the Naxi Wedding Courtyard in Lijiang, Yunnan’s number one destination for young Han urbanites and entrepreneurs hoping to pursue their dreams of happiness and success away from their polluted hometowns.

The book’s ethnographic focus emerges in stages, starting with the historical setting for Lijiang’s reputation as an idyllic site of desire and escape in the early 20th-century “discovery” of the Naxi people’s “magic kingdom” by the Austro-American botanist, anthropologist and adventurer Joseph Rock, and by the Russian exile and explorer Peter Goullart. An introduction to Lijiang’s heritage “Old Town” contrasts the recent emergence of domestic ethnic tourism as a mainstay of local and provincial economies in Yunnan, with the destruction of local religious and cultural practices during the Cultural Revolution. Focusing on Lijiang’s development as a UNESCO-sponsored World Heritage Site after a devastating earthquake in 1996, its revitalized reputation as an exotic destination for romantic travellers received official support in the form of cultural theme parks in and around the town.

Lijiang’s alternative tourist experience was shaped in part by the official reworking of everyday Naxi practices as “Dongba culture.” Dongba had long been regarded as the ritual guardians of Naxi religion, whose skills in chanting, dancing and divination derived from the instructions contained in religious scriptures, written in pictographic Naxi script on hand-made paper, vast numbers of which were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The restoration of Dongba practices as “Dongba culture” was part of a deliberate policy from the late 1970s managed by Lijiang’s Dongba Culture Research Institute. Established in 1981, this institutionalization of “Dongba culture” sought to manage the articulation of local ethnic and religious identity in sanitized terms that corresponded with official policies to promote public expressions of ethnic identification as potentially lucrative sources of local income. The revitalization of traditional weddings in the form offered by the Naxi Wedding

Courtyard was one outcome of such a transformation. Its success depended on the efforts of its key “actors”: the manager, the Dongba who conducted the wedding rituals, the expert advisor, the moderator/MC and the dancer. The relationship between their individual ambitions, the government’s promotion of cultural industry, and the involvement of the heritage establishment offers ethnographic glimpses of the complex interests at work in fashioning the Courtyard’s “authentic” experience of real live weddings into performances of mock weddings customized to maximize audience entertainment. Its “guests” – young urbanites who met, married and launched commercial projects in Lijiang – were captivated by the Courtyard’s Dongba wedding ritual, and excited by the prospect of discovering future life away from the big city. However, when faced with the constraints of having to negotiate with local officials and local people in order to sustain a living, they found themselves drawn back to the consumer practices they had turned their backs on. Since they retained their household registration in their hometowns, they could return periodically for medical care, or to enable a child to benefit from better schooling than in Lijiang. The book thus ends with the bitter lie of the stories of the young romantics for whom the mystical aura of Lijiang’s romantic heritage was no more than a temporary marker of a desire to escape into an alternative lifestyle, but which lost its appeal once the realities of making a living and childcare set in.

After a few years away, the author returned to find that the Wedding Courtyard had closed down. The local government’s budget had apparently dried up, and the manager decided to move into the restaurant business. The Dongba who had initially enthralled his audiences with his ritual chanting had found employment elsewhere, including writing Dongba calligraphy in a new tourist theme park.

Much of the ethnographic detail in these chapters is fascinating for its insights into the changeable relationships between young urbanites’ dreams of escape from the pressures of contemporary life, and official and entrepreneurial deployment of heritage and ethnic tourism to boost local community and individual incomes. However, the narrative obscures the book’s initial promise to unpack established views about heritage authenticity and its commercialization, and analysis of these relationships tends to be framed in general and sometimes contradictory terms. Hence, we learn that the performances in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard contributed to helping Naxi people “rediscover and value their Dongba practices” (p. 69) but that “in the process of customisation they become further disconnected from their own heritage” (p. 85). Or, claiming that due to the Naxi’s history of Sinicization that local Naxi are “now willing to engage in heritage practices and tourist consumption” (p. 139) does not sit comfortably alongside a young Naxi woman mentioning to her Han friend how the commercialization of Lijiang’s “Old Town” effectively priced young Naxi like herself out of the possibility of sustaining a living in what used to be their homes.

The narrative’s treatment of history, methodology and theory would benefit from greater analytical precision. For example, the Red Guards’ experiences of travel to the main sites of Mao’s revolution are problematically compared to the recent commercially driven promotion of “red tourism.” The comment that before the reform era there was little interest in material heritage ignores the significant archaeological finds of the early and mid-1970s. More too could be made of the tensions and implicit rivalries between the Dongba trained since childhood in the complex skills of Dongba ritual and the local scholar/adviser acknowledged as a member of the local cultural elite. Despite the book’s claims to include analysis of local responses, it follows a structure and explores practices that are removed from the lives of ordinary Naxi people dislocated from their homes by the commercial developments of the “Old Town.” In this, it misses the opportunity to give proper consideration to their frequently

critical comments, documented in the work of Chinese as well as Western scholars, about the tensions caused to Lijiang's local populations by the local government's eagerness to engage with UNESCO-driven renderings of heritage construction. Finally, the author's theoretical references are almost bewildering in their diversity, but without sufficient elaboration. His interest in post-colonial theory, for example, does not lead to critical reflection on how China's experience of colonialism and post-colonialism might inflect the current obsession with global recognition for heritage preservation.

In all then, this ambitious book gives rise to many fascinating questions, more considered responses to which must await further research.

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*Asymmetrical Neighbors: Borderland State Building between China and Southeast Asia*

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In *Asymmetrical Neighbors*, Enze Han embarks on an ambitious project: 1) to theorize how in multi-ethnic borderlands, state and national building are “interactive processes across national boundaries” (p. 4); and 2) “to offer a rich and detailed account of the modern history of state and national building in the borderland between China, Myanmar and Thailand” since the Second World War (p. 4). Han is fluent in Chinese, Burmese, Thai and English, allowing him to source documents in the original languages.

Han nearly accomplishes these goals. His account is well written and well organized. There are two shortcomings. First, for theories of state and nation building he draws only on the bellicist theory, associated with Charles Tilley (pp. 27–28), which argues that state building relies on military coercion, and that nation building is strengthened by foreign war and a “rally behind the flag effect” (p. 30). In borderlands with multiple ethnicities, Han adds a “neighborhood effect” (p. 9), where “state building in one country can be influenced by the same process in neighboring states” (p. 9). Under conditions of power asymmetry, the two possibilities are: 1) adversarial, when the stronger state meddles politically and militarily in the weaker one; and 2) amicable, when the more powerful state exerts economic influence. If state power is equal, the possibilities are: 3) a mutually militarized borderland in adversarial conditions; and 4) friendly relations, where there is no neighbourhood effect (p. 10). These conceptualizations of state building are not quite robust enough to explain Han's complicated stories involving multiple armies, international actors, regional organizations and diverse ideologies. Han fails to refer back to them in subsequent chapters, or to reprise them in the conclusion. For nation building, Han asserts that for border-straddling ethnicities, those in the stronger country may help those in the weaker country and those in the weaker country may resent their own country (p. 10). Han offers examples of ethnic groups in China helping those in Myanmar, and those in Thailand offering refuge to those from Myanmar. These conceptualizations work.

Second, Han's grasp of the China–Myanmar borderland history is greater than his understanding of the Thailand–Myanmar story. Doing a cross-border study is difficult, but it requires an equal understanding of the history, politics and cultures on