

Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant Report

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With the support of Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant, I conducted my preliminary ethnographic and primary source research in Northwest Yunnan, China during summer 2008. These activities have not only contributed to the establishment of significant contacts and social relations for my future fieldwork but also allowed me to concentrate on carrying out and improving my dissertation project.

Generally speaking, my dissertation concerns the effect of place reconstruction in Northwest Yunnan by means of the production of “original ecological” (*yuanshengtai*) performances in the era of globalization in the intersection of capitalized touristic imaginations, Chinese state power and ethnic minority groups’ everyday activities. According to a pamphlet introducing an original ecological performance, this performance genre is especially characterized by “farmers,” “unprofessional performers,” “native,” and “nature.” From an anthropological perspective, I am particularly interested in how local ethnic minorities have served as vehicles to embody and practice this regional development model which advocates for the economic and social rights of minorities as well as the promotion and protection of cultural heritage by inviting domestic/global tourists as their audiences.

For the preliminary fieldwork, I’ve visited the tourist hot spots in northwest Yunnan such as Lijiang and Shangri-La and mainly focused on the following methods for collecting image and rhetoric created both by the state and the translocal tourism developmentalists to package “original ecological performances” in northwest Yunnan: 1.) observation of different touristic performances labeled as “original ecological” productions, and semi-structured interviews with the translocal developmentalists and the performers of local ethnic minorities, and 3.) archive research in local bookstores and institutions. By means of these methods, I explored how the touristic and cultural performances of “original ecology” have presented China’s ethnic minorities through encoded but contested narratives.

With the idea of exploring how the idea of “original ecological performances” is performed, I began my primary research by locating myself in the touristic spots. Staying in these areas allowed me to participate and examine the tourist-oriented performances ranging from the state-sponsored “grand original ecological real scene performances” to daily performances of original ecological singers and dancers on the streets. I realized that the daily touristic scenes of renewed traditions and narratives of minority identities are the products of mass cultural representations of both local residents and visitors through their encounters and embodiment. I came to identify the application of such a term as “original ecological performances” in this region as a performative mechanism for the articulation of an appreciation of ethnic minority identity, an exercise of the power of the state and recognition of global economy.

By speaking formally and informally to a range of people involved in performing minority identity including tourist guides, housekeepers, market vendors and performers, I gained a stronger sense of the translocal developments as a result of economic liberalization and global market-orientation in rapidly changing China. It is through my study of the numerous encounters of local residents and tourists in daily basis that I narrowed my anthropological research topic to explore how “original ecological performances” framed by translocal tourism developments, state power and globalization effects the flow of ethnic minority labors in this

region.

During my stay in northwest Yunnan, I collected and recorded various images, clips and rhetoric produced by the projects of the official regional development plans and the policies concerning minority nationalities. I started to analyze data from mass broadcast and print media, including internet, television programs, and tourist pamphlets to analyze the flows of rhetoric and images through the propaganda promoting the tourism development. In a setting where tourist encounters as a contested space for social interactions open up and establish new local and translocal relations, I found that these related archive survey provided necessary knowledge to understand the symbolic and iconic meanings of “original ecology” for different social actors collaborating in the construction of the landscape in this region.

My extensive and intensive investigation with the help of the Scott Kleck-Jenson Travel Grant in this summer has provided me further insight into the embodiment of “original ecology” as spatial identity construction in the region. The preliminary fieldwork has helpfully and practically equipped me to understand the use of “original ecology” as a performative form throughout the course of tourism production in the conjuncture of the regional economic development, the state power implement and the globalization trend, and thus I am greatly indebted to the Scott Kloeck-Jensen family and Global Studies for the funding support. Besides coming up with more in-depth themes and specific questions for my dissertation project by means of the harvest during my summer trip, I expect my following doctoral research will practically contribute to the awareness and concerns for the notions of social justice in relation to globalization.