

Disneyization in Shangri-La

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Abstract

In 2001, the Chinese government officially recognized Zhongdian County in Yunnan Province as Shangri-La, which is a fictional concept that signifies paradise introduced by the British author James Hilton (1933). Ever since the region has been renamed, some visitors have started to express that Shangri-La County has transformed into a theme park and has lost its authenticity. The current essay explored, by using Bryman's (2004) theory of Disneyization as a framework, whether it can be said that the name change into Shangri-La has changed the region into a theme park. The resources of this research were scholarly literature, travel blogs and TripAdvisor reviews about Shangri-La. Of the four principles mentioned in Disneyization, that all describe a trend common to a theme park, the principles of theming, hybrid consumption and merchandising were all found to be take place in the Shangri-La region. Only performative labor, as defined in the theory, was considerably less present in Shangri-La County. However, in regard to how Chinese theme parks (like Yunnan Ethnic Folk Village) function, such as the lack of smiling service, the principle of performative labor may still apply to Shangri-La. Thus, the result indicates that Shangri-La is comparable to a theme park and that how the theory of Disneyization is defined currently has no universal validity because it takes no cultural differences in account.

Furthermore, in view of Jean Baudrillard's (1994) account of postmodernism, Shangri-La is similar to a theme park in that they both create a hyper-reality in which a highly similar but 'unreal' reality is experienced by visitors through the processes of simulation or simulacrum. In this sense, the Shangri-La narrative has bestowed a frame by which tourists started to percept and experience the region's authenticity. However, considering that Western tourists are predominantly the ones seeking authenticity in Shangri-La – may it be an authentic setting or an authentic self – it is their confrontation with the touristic environments like Dukezong that sways them to evaluate the region as a theme park. The voices of the local population and Chinese tourists were not brought into account in the current research; future research should therefore explore deeper how these groups' experience the changes in Shangri-La County.

Keywords: Authenticity, China, Disneyization, Ethnicity, Shangri-La, Theme Park, Tourism

Introduction

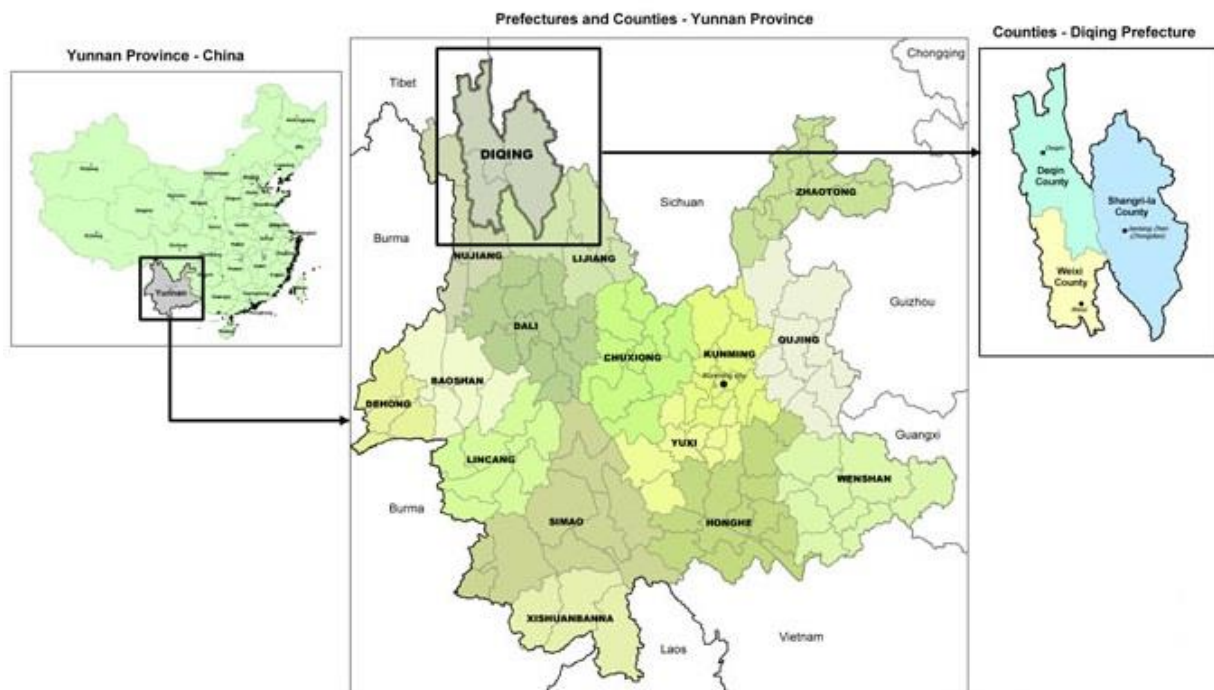
“This movie is a reminder, that it is our state of consciousness that is reflected as the world at all times.”

Deepak Chopra (2015) about his favorite movie *Lost Horizon* (1937) based on James Hilton’s (1933) novel with the same name about Shangri-La.

In 2001, the Chinese central government pinpointed Shangri-La, a word synonymous for paradise, in the northwest of Yunnan Province in China (see Picture 1) (Hillman 2003). Located close to the Tibetan plateau, the region formerly known as Zhongdian County has been officially recognized for its spectacular mountainous surroundings (more than 3000 meters above sea level) and diversity in culture. Approximately 38 percent of the population belongs to an ethnic minority, of which the Tibetans are the largest in the County (China.org 2015). With the name change from Zhongdian to Shangri-La, a sense of mystery was added to the region’s features that started to attract both foreign and domestic tourists. Nowadays, almost the whole Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where Shangri-La County is located together with Dêqên County and Weixi Lisu Autonomous County, is advertised as the spot to experience a paradise filled with teashops, guesthouses, snowcapped peaks and Tibetan Buddhist culture.

Interestingly, Shangri-La is a fictional and Western concept. British author James Hilton (1933) introduced the idea in his novel *Lost Horizon*, which tells the adventurous story of the British diplomat Conway and his three Western companions. After their airplane crashes somewhere in the Himalaya region, the travelers end up in the mysterious Shangri-La where its leader – a French priest – wishes to pass on his role to Conway and entrust him with the task of protecting the place’s worldly treasures for a time when the world is free of wars (Hillman 2003). Hilton who never set foot in China popularized ‘Shangri-La’ in the novel as a remote and concealed mystical paradise somewhere in the Sino-Tibetan region (Buckley 2008), where inhabitants follow principles of peace and enjoy unheard-of longevity (Berbaum 2001). In effect, Shangri-La, which inspired songs, movies and even a Hong Kong-based hotel branch, became a desired place that captivated the imagination of many. To accommodate the increasing number of tourists, Shangri-La County and the whole Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture underwent a makeover to facilitate tourism. Considering the fact that Shangri-La’s origins are fictional and that its location is supposed to be hidden, how and why has it been positioned at this particular location in China? Moreover, is it possible to

provide a tourist destination that can be called paradise without losing (or more logical, not having) the characteristics of what it should entail?



Picture 1. Shangri-La County in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, China

Paradise Found

The association of the Shangri-La narrative with the Diqing Prefecture – where Zhongdian County is located – began when traditional Naxi music performer Xuan Ke from Lijiang (a city located in Lijiang County, see Picture 1) claimed after reading Hilton’s novel in late 1994 that this region was Hilton’s inspirational source (MacCloud and MacCloud 2001). Specifically, Xuan argued that Hilton was inspired by his father’s friend: the Austrian botanist and photographer Joseph Rock, who wrote several articles and books about the Sino Tibetan region and stayed in Lijiang from 1922 to 1949 (Hillman 2003). Furthermore, several sources do state that copies of Rock’s photographs and writings in *National Geographic* (e.g., Rock 1930) were found at Hilton’s home (Buckley 2008; Hillman 2003). In this sense, as Hilton’s inspirational source, Rock could be considered the discoverer of the Shangri-La region in its authentic state. Yet, because other Provinces like Sichuan and Gansu also make an appearance in Rock’s work (for pictures, see onshadow 2017), Zhongdian County and Yunnan Province may not be the only areas that inspired Hilton to conceptualize Shangri-La. Regardless of whether Xuan’s claim is true or not, the publication of his discovery in Asian

newspapers in 1995 commenced the attraction of several thousands of tourists to the area. Since the concept of Shangri-La did not (yet) exist in China at the time, primarily Western tourists started to visit the Diqing Prefecture.

Although local authorities were wary at first of Xuan's discovery, fearing that as a Western notion Shangri-La would either promote Tibetan independence or be seen as a colonial concept, when they noticed it attracting tourists to the region they easily changed their minds (MacCloud and MacCloud 2001). Thus, the County governments of Diqing Prefecture decided – partially stimulated by the increasing tourist industry trend in Yunnan Province – to invest in Shangri-La's exotic name. To strengthen their claim to the Shangri-La brand, Zhongdian County officials instructed a group of experts (i.e., historians, anthropologists and linguists) in 1996 to collect evidence for the proposition that their County is the 'true' Shangri-La (Hillman 2003, 177). Although most of the evidence and arguments in the final report was questionable – for example, the Chinese given name of Zhongdian is said to suppress Tibetans by its Tibetan meaning that it does not have (Hillman 2003) – the result eventually led to a Prefectural government conference in Zhongdian in 1997 to formally declare Diqing Prefecture to be the home of Shangri-La.

Monetary incentives have played a significant role in the local authorities' wish to be called Shangri-La, especially when Beijing decided to ban all logging activities in 1998 to prevent environmental disasters along the Yangzi River (Hillman 2003, 175-6). At the time, the timber industry accounted for 80 percent of the prefecture's GDP. The Shangri-La brand provided an outlet to this problem for with its popular cultural narrative, Zhongdian County would be assured to attain cultural status and economic growth through business opportunities in the form of tourism (Hillman 2015). Eventually, the surrounding regions such as Bomi County and Chayu County (both located in Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR]) noticed Shangri-La's potential as well and started to compete for the brand (Hillman 2015). Zhongdian officials decided to speed into action, when they heard that Daocheng County in Sichuan Province also started to produce a report that would 'prove' that they are the true Shangri-La (Hillman 2003). Armed with their final report, Zhongdian County officials quickly appealed to change their name and asked the Yunnan Provincial government for support, who, after approving, forwarded the application to the chief administrative authority of the People's Republic of China (PRC): the State Council. In their request, the local and provincial authorities argued to the State Council that the name change would be consistent with the province's goal of tourism-led development and in turn would support the general

development of the province that would make Diqing Prefecture a leading Tibetan area in China (Hillman 2003, 179). As a result, Zhongdian County successfully received the state's official recognition as Shangri-La in 2001.

Hence, aside from County officials' own financial incentive, the Chinese state's reason in approving the name change of Zhongdian County into Shangri-La is of importance. A significant motive in this decision is the Chinese authorities' goal of promoting the 'image of China as a unified, multicultural and multiethnic state (Kolås 2004, 273).' In China, every person belongs to a *minzu* (i.e., nationality) (Mackerass 2004). According to the national census of 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011), the majority of people is ethnically Han (91,51 percent) and the rest (only 8,49 percent) belongs to one of the 55 state-recognized ethnic minorities. Tourism is used by the Chinese government as an important means to negotiate the connotations of these nationalities, in which an image is constructed wherein the Han are represented as modern and cosmopolitan and ethnic minorities are shown to be exotic and colorful varieties of Chinese culture (Gladney 1994). In a similar discourse, Tibetan society has been portrayed by the Chinese Communist state as feudal and superstitious (Swain 2013, 46). However, by depicting Zhongdian County – which is proximally and ethnically close to Tibet – as the 'exotic' Shangri-La, a more favorable image of Tibetan-ness was created (Kolås 2004, 273). The Shangri-La narrative thus presented an opportunity to more positively include Tibet in China's image of a nation. Therefore, from the government's perspective, the decision to rename the region into Shangri-La was a strategic one to construct an image fitting with the state's catchphrase 'unity in diversity' (Gladney 1994).

Although the Chinese state's plan in supporting the development of Shangri-La would suggest that ethnic minorities have no influence on their cultural representation, by allowing the state-sponsored media's objectivizing gaze, ethnic minorities have also received a stage upon which they can establish their identity and voice their rights (Gladney 1994). For example, during the Shangri-La Arts festival in May that promotes the tourism in the area, ethnic minorities were happily and proudly performing dances based on their own traditions that would otherwise be forgotten because younger generations wish to modernize (Hillman 2003). From this perspective, the tourism of ethnic minorities in Shangri-La County strengthens their ethnic consciousness and revitalizes their own cultural identity.

Shangri-La, paradise turned theme park?

The Chinese state, local authorities, and ethnic minorities are all producers and influencers of Zhongdian County's transformation into tourist destination Shangri-La. Cater (2001, 49) states that there are some inherent contradictions in presenting a location that can be called a Utopia: (1) it is almost an impossible assignment to match the actualities of the place to the constructed images that consumers and producers have; (2) even more so, the expectations per potential tourist or provider will differ in his/her imagination of the dream place; and (3) lastly, because of the contingencies of place it may develop into a 'lucrative' Shangri-La identity. Whether this last point by Cater (2001) is a negative development is debatable since the inhabitants of Shangri-La County, for example, too benefit from tourism with the construction of houses with modern facilities (Hillman 2013). Still, it is clear that the difficulty of combining these endogenous and exogenous factors will likely shatter the beliefs some visitors have of the place. This is particularly the case for Western tourists who seem to value qualities like 'authenticity' more in their travels than Chinese visitors do (Kolås 2004). Indeed, some (Cater 2001; Llamas and Belk 2011) are arguing that the region is becoming more and more comparable to a theme park. For example, journalist Zurick (2009, 20) wrote in *FOCUS on geography* that the '... old Tibetan quarter, meanwhile, has taken on the qualities of a theme park.'

However, if Shangri-La is a theme park, it would not be one in the traditional sense. Although there is no universal definition of a theme park in both the Western and Asian contexts, those involved in theme park tourism see Disneyland as the standard (Zhang 2007). Wong (2015, 4) defines a theme park as follows: 'a controlled tourist setting that offers an enjoyable yet predictable experience requiring little exertion or initiative.' A similar notion was offered by Camp (1997, 4-5), who states that 'a theme park is an outdoor entertainment facility which is designed around a central theme and provides rides, attractions and shows to visitors at the cost of a single admission fee (as described in Wong 2015, 4).' On the basis of these definitions, Shangri-La does not tick all the boxes that are typical for a theme park. Unlike Disneyland, to enter Shangri-La no entrance fee is required, it is not an enclosed place and there is no overall management for all the different businesses (Wong 2015). Additionally, in Shangri-La there is a lack of control over tourists' experiences, for there are no strict passages that determine where people are allowed to go or not.

Furthermore, the nature and history of the Shangri-La region is quite different and idiosyncratic to that of a theme park. A theme park is typically designed around a theme and built according to a blueprint by a single organization (Wong 2015, 2). In the case of Shangri-La County, most sightseeing spots that represent the theme of Tibetan Buddhism were not especially invented for its tourism. Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where Shangri-La County is located, has for centuries been in the sphere of influence of both Tibet and China (Kolås 2004). When the Buddhist clergy increased its political influence in the Tibetan region, the polity of Tibet gradually was characterized by Buddhism. Evidently, the Diqing region became a part of this representation since the Songtseling Monastery, established in 1679 in the not yet existing Shangri-La County, was not only used as a center of administration, learning, and religious life, but also as a means to strengthen the control of the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa (the traditional capital of Tibet) over the region (Kolås 2004, 264). The Songtseling Monastery therefore integrates the area of Diqing to the sacralized territory of Tibet and signifies it as Buddhist. Thus, in comparison to a theme park, not all buildings in Shangri-La were deliberately designed purely for entertainment; they project a deeper historical, cultural and political meaning.

Nevertheless, the (re)constructions newly made to facilitate tourism show a different side to this argument: of which Dukezong, the showcase Tibetan town and touristic center of Shangri-La County (Llamas and Belk 2011), is the prime account. Located in the middle of the County, Dukezong once functioned as an important trading post between Beijing and Lhasa, for it was on the only overland route that connected these two places in the Sino Tibetan region (Hillman 2015; Kolås 2004). However, in the 1950s when new roads to Tibet were built through the provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai, the area became neglected and gradually abandoned by the local inhabitants. Hillman (2015, 3), who visited Dukezong in 1999, described the town as a dusty and unremarkable place with only 'one paved road, which provided access to various tile-clad government offices, a bank, a post office and a musty state-run hotel which hosted local official banquets.' Subsequently, when the region became known as Shangri-La, local authorities were particularly motivated to revamp the once forgotten Dukezong for tourism. Nowadays, in Dukezong the Tibetan Buddhist ornaments such as Dharma Wheels adorn the main façades of hotels, souvenir stands and restaurants.

Research Question and Framework

Thus, the changes that have taken place at Zhongdian County since the area began advertising itself as Shangri-La have arguably turned the region into a commercial venue for some (Western) tourists. The popular sociological theory of Disneyization by Alan Bryman (2004), that hypothesizes that parts of society are transforming into structures similar to Disneyland, proposes that there are four recognizable trends that mark a location similar to a theme park. Specifically, in his book *The Disneyization of Society*, Bryman (2004, 1) defines Disneyization as follows:

‘The process by which *the principles* of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world [emphasis in original].’

The four principles of Disneyization are theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising and performative labor and are argued to be applicable to a broad range of businesses, including tourist locations (Bryman 2004). In the current essay I will explore whether it can be said that the Zhongdian County, now known as the ‘utopian’ Shangri-La, has transformed into a theme park or not, by measuring to what extent Disneyization’s principles (Bryman 2004) are present in the region. However, taking into consideration that Bryman’s theory is mostly defined from a Western – and more specifically American – perspective, which can be perceived by his chosen examples (e.g., Disneyland and Hard Rock Café) and his theory’s definition (‘.. sectors of *American* society ..’) (Bryman 2004, 1), the current essay will also look at how a Chinese theme parks function differently from Western parks. In this manner, the current essay also tests whether Disneyization’s theory still applies in a Chinese context and has universal validity.

Before exploring the main research question, I will discuss what the effects of Shangri-La’s paradise narrative are on the subjective experiences of visitors in view of concepts such as postmodernism and authenticity. Specifically, I will look at why tourists perceive Shangri-La County as real on basis of its fictional narrative and what in turn makes them express that the region has turned into a theme park. Furthermore, Chinese and Western tourists’ reasons for visiting the area will be explored as to see whether Shangri-La can fulfil the needs of both groups in presenting a tourist destination that entails paradise. Taking into consideration that the question of whether Shangri-La County is a theme park or not is inadvertently associated with the subjective experience of tourists, the proposed questions will

clear up how from a subjective point of view, Shangri-La County is comparable to a theme park for tourists or not.

A literature research as well as an analysis of travel blogs and the review website TripAdvisor – that offer information about the area – were the resources of this investigation. Although sources like travel blogs and TripAdvisor are unreliable for they are based on opinions, their information helps to uncover why tourists experience Shangri-La County as a theme park and evaluate it as it having lost its authenticity. The current research is predominantly focused on Western tourists; it is thus acknowledged that the coverage is incomplete because the voices of Han Chinese or ethnic minorities are not represented in this essay.

The Shangri-La narrative and tourist's perceptions

Through the government's encouragement of giving grants and tax-free periods, many houses in Dukezong were constructed or renovated by local institutions especially for tourism (Llamas and Belk 2011). The designs that were used in (re)building the houses of Tibetan style architecture were often more elaborate than the original, in that, the decorations of daily tasks such as farming and fishing were replaced by sensual images of minority women in suggestive poses (Hillman 2003, 183). This implies that the original buildings and the cultural meanings that were embedded into them have been either lost or altered for the sake of tourism.

The creation of superficial – and meaningless – markers is recognizable in reference to the discourse of postmodernism embedded in a theme park, which is generally 'articulated with an emphasis on simulacra, pastiche, imagination and fantasy (Zhang 2007, 212).' In this regard, the Shangri-La region, and in particular Dukezong, is similar to a theme park.

The postmodernity of Shangri-La and theme parks

However, it is primarily the cultural narrative of Shangri-La that has bestowed postmodern features on the Diqing Prefecture considering that the theme of paradise is grounded in fantasy rather than reality. Postmodernism argues that the truth and its realities are always subjective (Featherstone 2007), which implies that Shangri-La County can be experienced as a real paradise if the beholder sees it as a reality or truth. From this perspective, Gao, Zhang and Decosta (2012) argue that Shangri-La's fictional origins brand the place as a phantasmal destination – a figment of imagination – which in turn implies that the interest in

Shangri-La County goes beyond the structures that occupy the place since the area is experienced by visitors in terms of its 'imaginative geography' (Driver 1999; Gao, Zhang and Decosta 2012). Therefore, why tourists wish to visit Shangri-La County in the first place, despite its fictional content, is because their imagination – which is social by nature and is thus, formed by the individual himself, his social environment and the media – shapes the way in which they experience and interact with people and places (Driver 1999). In this sense, the cultural narrative of Shangri-La creates a frame in which tourists perceive Shangri-La County as paradise.

That Shangri-La County, and its touristic environment, can be seen by tourists as an authentic paradise suggests that the region creates what postmodernist theorist and sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1994) calls a hyper-reality, where reality is so diverse that it transforms into a hallucinatory resemblance of itself. In the context of Shangri-La County, the hyper-reality created shows that the location is experienced by tourists through the simulation of a fictional reality and that there is a simulacrum placed on the region, which means that the perception shows a copy of reality with no actual original (Baudrillard 1994). In this sense, as Hannigan (1998, 4) mentions, in a hyper-reality the space between illusion and authenticity recedes. In this sense, the concept of hyper-reality explains why visitors of theme parks (such as Disneyland) are able to enjoy the location and may experience it as somewhat authentic (Zhang 2007). Thus, tourists' perceptions and experiences of Shangri-La County – influenced by the paradise narrative – are similar to that of a theme park, in that, in both cases a hyper-reality is created that causes them to perceive the environment to a certain extent as real despite its fictional content.

Authenticity in Shangri-La

Yet, the hyper-reality created by Shangri-La's imaginative geography is sometimes broken for tourists. Tourists' perception that Shangri-La has become a paradise lost – or 'a tourist trap' (Ford 2007) – often relate to the fact that their prior expectations were not met since they expected to find, as the name suggests, a paradise. Lu, Chi and Liu (2015) found statistical evidence that destination image mediates the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and perceived authenticity. This suggests that perceived authenticity is an important influencing factor in forming a favorable image of a tourist destination that leads to tourists' satisfaction. From this perspective, claims of Shangri-La County having become spoilt by mass tourism (Ford 2007), conveys a notion that the region has lost its perceived

authenticity for visitors. However, bearing in mind that Shangri-La's narrative is fictional in nature; tourists' expectations of finding an objectively authentic paradise in Shangri-La County are logically not met. Nonetheless, Shangri-La County shows how authenticity functions in the case of a phantasmal destination.

Authenticity is found to be a subjective, dynamic and fluid concept that is much sought after by tourists in heritage tourism (Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003). Wang (1999) defined authenticity into three types: objective, constructive and existential. The objective approach to authenticity is based on the assumption that an expert can measure and determine the true nature of an object's authenticity (such as a painting in a museum) (Zhu 2012). Considering that most buildings have been (re)constructed in Shangri-La for tourism, measuring the authenticity by its structures primarily labels it as a theme park. Conversely, constructive authenticity relies on tourists' expectations, beliefs, imagery, preferences, and stereotyped images (Wang 1999), which means that for tourists toured objects may appear authentic, even if they are inherently not (Zhu 2012). In this sense, various versions of authenticity exist since it is negotiable (Cohen 1988). Finally, existential authenticity is not related to the toured object per se, but denotes an individual's authentic experience or search of being one's 'true self' (Wang 1999) which for example can be achieved by participating in certain activities such as dance or camping, which creates a situation where you are confronted with yourself and your achievements.

In the case of Shangri-La County, tourists who are relatively fine with Shangri-La's commodification generally experience it through both constructive and existential authenticity. In the first place, the reason why it would be possible for anyone to perceive Shangri-La County as authentic is because it is constructive, in that they project their subjective expectations of a phantasmal destination on the objects and structures in the environment (Wang 1999). In this view, as Knudsen, Rickly and Vidon (2016) state, authenticity can be better understood as a fantasy. They reason that '...authenticity, as a fantasy, is about more than motivation for experience, but it is related to deeper psychological demands that arise from alienation (Knudsen, Rickly and Vidon 2016, 43).' Some individuals may feel alienated from modern society, seeing it as inauthentic, which motivates them to look for an authentic life elsewhere; they start looking 'for the pristine, the primitive, the natural and that which is yet untouched by modernity (Cohen 1988, 374).' From this perspective, the fantasy of authenticity functions to avoid an encounter with reality and provides a quest of finding one's

authentic self. Thus, most tourists in Shangri-La seem to experience a constructively and existentially imagined authenticity about the region.

Western and Chinese tourists' expectations

Existential authenticity plays a role mostly in Western tourists' experiences of Shangri-La County, for they believe that Tibet and its form of Buddhism will restore their spirits from the dissolving effects of Western civilization (Cingcade 1998). Howard (2016, 366) found that Westerners feel that mountain villagers from the Himalayas, despite the fact that they are economically poor by world standards, are more spiritual, happier and freer, for they live in a more authentic relation to nature by for example growing their own food and collecting water. Furthermore, for a long time in Western imagination, the Himalayas have symbolized the modern ideals of spirituality, authenticity and wild nature (Llamas and Belk 2011). Shangri-La County therefore functions as a surrogate for the expectations and desires of Westerners who believe this area will give them spiritual salvation (Ying 2014).

Western tourists' discourse of Shangri-La County, as Howard (2016) argues, ultimately tells more about them than the actual location. For example, if a Western traveler complains that the roads, cars and electricity in Shangri-La County are destroying the traditional culture (Howard 2016, 359), that individual is also inadvertently suggesting that he prefers that the local population stays underdeveloped. Furthermore, this shows an orientalist view (Said 1979) of what may be considered to be authentic in Shangri-La through Western eyes, in which the Orient (e.g., Shangri-La) is presented as the opposite of the West's modern, masculine and inauthentic identity and thus representing it as backwards, feminine – yet authentic. Therefore, Western tourists in search of an authentic, pristine, and primitive Other unconsciously demand that the Shangri-La population stays backward.

Beside Western tourists, the Shangri-La region also attracts a lot of domestic tourists. According to Yunnan Tourism bureau, the number of Chinese tourists overshadows the relatively small number of international tourists, and is rising, with 80,000 in 2002 and about 400,000 in 2008 (Yeh and Coggins, 2014). Considering that in contrast to Westerners Han Chinese have none or slight cultural understanding of Shangri-La, what encourages them to visit? According to Llamas and Belk (2011), Shangri-La reminds Chinese of their own cultural version of paradise described in the poem 'The Tale of the Peach Blossom Spring' by Tao Yuanming in 421AD. A poem that is of such importance, that it functions as the prototype of the Chinese genre of Utopian fiction (Fokkema 2011, 165). Why this name was

not chosen for Zhongdian County has two reasons: 1) the imagery of peach blossoms in Tao's poem does not match with the mountainous region of Shangri-La County, making it unsuitable to use as a brand name; and 2) the poem is already in use by other tourist destinations, such as Taohuayuan (also known as 'the land of Peach Blossom Spring') in Hunan province (Fokkema 2011). Nonetheless, the fact that Shangri-La's discovery provided a new scenic spot, in a domestic tourism market where demands for more tourist locations were rising, its entry was very welcome (Llamas and Belk 2011).

Nowadays, tourism in China is seen as a symbol of modernity for it was condemned as a bourgeoisie activity and was thus forbidden to do during the Mao period (Nyíri 2006). To create this sense of modernity at travel destinations, Chinese tourists expect to find both signs of modernity (e.g., big hotels, infrastructure, and cable cars) and a primitive 'Other' through which they would validate their cultural superiority (Llamas and Belk 2011). In this sense, both Western and Chinese tourists expect the population of Shangri-La to be portrayed in a backward setting, but for different reasons: Westerners seek an authentic experience – of themselves and nature –, while Han Chinese want to feel modern. However, in contrast to Westerners, Chinese seem to have fewer problems with staged sets or performances (MacCannell 2011), most likely because their source of what is authentic is based on the stereotyped images portrayed in mass media, touristic advertising and literature (Yang and Wall 2009), and they seek to escape their urban home for enjoyment and relaxation by indulging themselves in luxury and conspicuous consumption (Llamas and Belk 2011). Thus, the difference between Western and Chinese tourists' responses to the authenticity of Shangri-La County may lie in how much they find that the region fulfills their personal needs (Yang and Wall 2009).

In short, ever since Zhongdian County received the Shangri-La name, this location has become comparable to a theme park because its fictional narrative has created a frame in which tourist experience the area. MacCannell (1973) argues that authenticity, which is an important aspect in tourism, can become lost when commodified because the focus is on profit. However, in view of Shangri-La's questionable authenticity (in that it is imaginative and constructive), the question of whether Shangri-La County is a theme park also depends on the individual's own perception, beliefs and background. Even though the region does not have all the features of a theme park (e.g., entry ticket), there are resemblances.

In the following section, the function of theme parks in China will be discussed as to see how they differ from Western parks (e.g., Disneyland) and thus the theory of Disneyization.

Chinese Theme Parks

When it comes to ideology and identity, theme parks are powerful shapers (Erb and Ong 2016). During the late 80s and early 90s, around the time that domestic tourism started to really grow in China, an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 amusement and theme parks were constructed with most of them based on folk customs or Chinese history (Nyíri 2006). Termed in the literature as a period of ‘theme park fever’, the newly developed theme parks strengthened the national landscape. Oakes (1998, 50) identifies it as ‘the beginning of tourism's active collaboration in the project of Chinese modernity’ and argues that ‘commercialism and commodification ... have combined to invent a nostalgic past upon which to build a sense of national identity ...’. Theme parks thus function as an important political instrument wherein a chosen theme can convey a state endorsed message or propagate a certain ideology.

Stanley (2002) argues that the ‘expression of the politics of nationalism’ is a defining feature that makes Chinese theme parks operate differently from Western ones, despite similarities on the surface. Furthermore, he argues that Chinese theme parks are different from Western parks in that they 1) do not rely on easy visual stereotypes (e.g., Mickey Mouse) and 2) have no internationalist universalism because the parks are specifically orientated towards the Chinese audience (Stanley 2002, 270). Foreign and nonfolk influences, such as McDonalds, are often excluded in Chinese theme parks. In this perspective, Disneyland in Hong Kong was not a big success because it was not catered towards Chinese visitors: smiling service, Western food, languages and jokes (Erb and Ong 2016, 11). In contrast, Disneyland in Shanghai, which opened in 2016, had more success because the construction of the resort – that lasted more than a decade and absorbed the funding of other Disney parks – focused on making it “authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese” (Martin and Makinen 2016). For example, Mickey Avenue was added to help visitors new to Disney to get familiar with its classic characters and Disney’s typical Main Street USA had been replaced by a large garden featuring Disney versions of the zodiac animals in Shanghai Disneyland (Martin and Makinen 2016). Thus, a Chinese theme park is different in that it is, among other things, represented in a for Chinese citizens recognizable framework.

If Shangri-La County is a theme park, its theme of paradise that focuses on Tibetan ethnicity and religion would suggest that it is most comparable to an ethnic theme park in China. Therefore, to see how theme parks in Chinese context differ from Western parks, the features of the ethnic theme park Yunnan Ethnic Folk Villages (YEFK) will be explored. YEFK is the chosen example because it is both close to Shangri-La County and has a village focused on the Tibetan ethnicity. Before analyzing YEFK, the nationalist message that is conveyed by presenting ethnic minorities in theme parks needs to be clarified. Specifically, the Chinese state's relation with its ethnic minorities and its project of nation building.

Chinese state and ethnic minorities

In China, ethnic minorities play an important role in the government's narrative of promoting the national self (Gladney 1994). In creating a national identity of Han Chinese, the state has designed projects that exhibit what, in the scholarly literature, is called internal orientalism (Schein 1997, 70), which means that 'a class/gender asymmetry is shown whereby minorities are represented chiefly by rural women and Han observers appear characteristically as male urban sophisticates.' The exoticized and objectified portrayal of ethnic minorities is, according to Gladney (1994, 94), 'essential to the construction of the Han Chinese majority, the very formulation of the Chinese "nation" itself.' Ethnic theme parks are thus an important proxy in establishing that cultural representation of minorities in China, which consequently creates the Chinese national identity.

The constructed hierarchy between the Han Chinese and ethnic minorities is not a recent development. Historically, people in the center of the Chinese empire perceived themselves as civilized while they considered those in the peripheral as barbarians, thereby 'denoting not only their marginality and inferiority but also the wilderness and defiance of their inhabitants (Ying 2014, 27).' Harrell (1996) argues that this kind of ideological rationale is part of a civilizing project wherein the civilized center justifies its domination over the peripheral by believing that they are helping them. The empire or government's goal is to 'civilize' people in the peripheral according to (their) measures that explains to them that they are both inferior and can be improved by these standards (Harrell 1996).

However, in 1949 the rationale and defining measures had to change with the establishment of the PRC since this new state redefined itself as 'a unitary multinational State built up jointly by the people of all its nationalities (Mackerras 2001, 216).' This meant that the different ethnic groups – that had predominantly inhabited the Qing Empire's previous

conquered territories, such as Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia – needed to be recognized and be brought together under the umbrella of nationhood. A new narrative needed to be constructed for a collective imagination of the nation, in the sense that it is ‘socially constructed by the people who identify themselves as part of a group and associated with certain beliefs, perceptions, images and discourses (Anderson 1991, 2).’

The PRC’s commitment to ethnic equality would have been meaningless without proper recognition of its variety of people and in order to do so, ethnic nationalities needed to be identified. The state invited ethnic minorities who identified themselves as distinct groups to come forward, however, more than 400 different groups registered (Davis 2007). Facing this problem of political representation for ethnic groups at the national level (Davis 2007), the State decided that the definition of ethnic identity had to be simplified. Thus, an ambitious project to radically reorganize ethnic identity was started. The massive research project of ‘ethnic classification’, in which ethnicity was equated to features such as language (Mullaney 2004), resulted in that only a couple of minorities in China were recognized. Throughout the years ethnicities have been added, leading to a current list of 55 state-recognized minority nationalities.

However, the ethnic classification project has not always been useful in bringing the different nationalities together. Although the PRC ideology entails that the center is seen as progressive but not explicitly Han and that all nationalities are considered equal, the ingrained prejudice towards minorities and the fact that people located at the center are predominantly Han, render the practice of its theory in vain (Harrell 1996). In this sense, how ethnic minorities are currently presented in the PRC can be considered a continuation of power-relation practices from the traditional Chinese state (Gladney 1994). Only, the form of how these relations are presented is different.

Features of a Chinese theme park: Yunnan Ethnic Folk Villages

The manner in which ethnic theme parks are constructed and displayed shows how the Chinese identity and that of ethnic minorities is created and consumed (Erb and Ong 2016). Located in Kunming city in the province of Yunnan, YEFV provides its visitors cultural performances, exhibitions of crafts, arts and costumes, and visits to replica villages of 26 ethnic minority cultures from Yunnan. In each Folk Village there are different activities for entertainment and/or education, such as musical performances and food tastings. The activities and constructions at YEFK focus on reinforcing the state’s image of ethnic

minorities as different variations of Chinese culture (Gladney 1994). In conveying the state's message in tourism, theme parks in China often utilize visitors' prior knowledge (e.g., topographic or historical) (Stanley 2002; Vasantkumar 2014), an approach that fits Chinese way of experiencing during their travels.

According to Nyíri (2006), in both theme parks and domestic tourism, for Chinese tourists the focus lies on scenic spots. Viewing locations as scenic spots is part of an old tradition of sojourning in China, in which sceneries are viewed through a lens of cultural references, obtained through literature, media and history lessons. This process of recognizing representations described in travel literature with their associated cultural references, has become part of a shared cultural grammar (Nyíri 2006, 12). In contrast to Westerners who prefer 'journeys of discovery', Chinese tourists approach their travels as 'journeys of confirmation' (Vasantkumar 2014, 56). Theme parks familiarize their visitors with representations of traditional scenery spots and guide them in how to experience these sites that they encounter (Nyíri 2006). For example, the YEFV website provides its visitors with a few 'best routes' that they can take. Therefore, how Chinese visitors experience theme parks and scenic spots that are created for consumption, is marked by standardization of meaning and narrative (Vasantkumar 2014).

Moreover, Chinese theme parks distinguish themselves from Western parks in how the landscape is utilized in creating a message. According to Stanley (2002, 272), the themes in traditional Chinese garden designs are also evident in Chinese theme parks, in that both make use of miniaturization and performances. As a display technique, miniaturization is perfect for the state's nation building project because due to its size it reduces and contains cultural differences. Varutti (2011, 12) thus argues that miniaturization can be deployed 'to anchor identities to ideal-types, to regulate social and inter-cultural relations and to promote understandings of the Chinese nation as "united and diverse"'. Furthermore, Chinese theme parks often contain a form of ethnographic realism which is a mimetic relationship between the image and the objective world. For example, in YEFV there is a lake in the park where three pagodas were placed that are highly similar replicas of the pagodas of the Chongsheng Temple in Dali, Yunnan province. This suggests that the landscape of a Chinese theme park is sometimes manipulated as to enhance its appeal, drawing inspiration from poems and paintings (Llamas and Belk 2011). Therefore, in Chinese tourists' experience, the imagination and knowledge associated with the scenic spot is important (Erb and Ong 2016).

Thus, Chinese theme parks are constructed differently from Western parks in terms of features such as miniaturization and ethnographic realism. In the following section, besides measuring Disneyization theory's four principles of theming, hybrid consumption, merchandizing and performative labor at Shangri-La County, it will be explored whether the definition of these principles still account in Chinese context, such as YEFV.

Theming

The first trend of Disneyization is theming and is described by Bryman (2004, 2) as 'clothing institutions or objects in a narrative that is largely unrelated to the institution or object to which it is applied.' He further adds that theming in tourism is about implementing a cultural narrative in a place that fairly fits the criteria to this account (Bryman 2004, 44-5). Multiple interconnected themes exist at Shangri-La County that appeal to tourists, some of which may fit better to Bryman's criteria than others.

Shangri-La themes: the exotic, the sacred and the ethnic

According to MacCannell (1976, 22), commodity has become an integral part of everyday life in modern society because its representation (i.e., advertisement that both promises and guides experiences) affects actual consumption. The representation of Shangri-La as a tourist destination that impacts tourists' experiences, expectations and perceived authenticity of the region is largely shaped by the media. Specifically, marketing is an important influential source. Llamas and Belk (2011), following Kolås (2004), state that the marketing of Shangri-La County is based on three processes that have been applied to this area through history: sacralization, ethnicitization and exotification. Kolås (2004, 263) discussed these three developments in the framework of the making of 'place' (i.e., investigating the interconnections between locality, identity and belonging). Assuming that the landscape can function as a source of identity and emplacement (Tilley, 1994), the environment and the associated experiences presented in the landscape, in the form of construction or nature, play an important role in developing the overall identity and perception of the place (Kolås 2004). Thus, the process of sacralization, ethnicitization and exotification that influences the landscape of Shangri-La County also affects its identity and meaning.

The sacralized and ethnicitized nature of the Shangri-La region has been implemented in its representation through the customs (e.g., Horse Racing Festival), architecture (e.g., Songsteling Monastery) and religious activities (Tibetan Buddhist rituals) of the Tibetans who

inhabited the area for centuries. When tourism in the region started, the Shangri-La theme prompted a process of exotification that gave another interpretation of these Tibetans features (Kolås 2004). It is the characteristics of the Shangri-La myth – of an inaccessible location where people peacefully live their lives together in a mist enshrouded valley beneath high snow white peaks – that inspired tourists to discover the Shangri-La region (Llamas and Belk 2011). In this sense, it is predominantly the cultural narrative of paradise that functions as an exotic frame that drives how the region is imagined and experienced by tourists (Erb and Ong 2016). The marketing of the Shangri-La narrative has thus created for the region a sense of ‘place’ (Kolås 2004) based on fictional terms.

The exotic frame caused by the Shangri-La narrative has been reinforced through both the (re)constructions of buildings and the creation of new scenic spots in the environment. Considering that Shangri-La County does not have the same exact characteristics (logically) as the description given in Hilton’s (1933) novel, some of the changes in the landscape can be seen to increase the County’s likeness to the paradise narrative for tourists. Many of the (artificially) produced scenic spots represent Shangri-La’s characteristic of an uninterrupted magnificent natural landscape, for example: the world heritage site (since 2003) Tiger Leaping Gorge – a huge canyon on the Jinsha River that connects to the Yangzi River – and the reservoir located to the right of Dukezong; National park Pudacuo (established in 2007). In Yunnan province, National parks like Pudacuo were created mostly by an endeavor stimulated by the American organization The Nature Conservancy since the 1990s (Paulson 2015). By creating National parks, they hope to encourage local governments to adopt methods of conserving the biodiverse landscape and to create economic opportunities for the local population (Paulson 2015; Zinda 2014). The Nature Conservancy’s involvement shows that Western values of sustainability and authenticity are projected on the landscape, which inadvertently dictates how the Shangri-La region should be treated; thus, by limiting rapid industrial development and focus on conservation, the region has actually become more artificial. Conversely, local officials use the National parks to their benefit, as the National parks are used to distinguish themselves from other regions as they function as scenic attractions that bolster claims of conservation (Zinda 2014). Consequently, National parks in Shangri-La County, besides partly protecting the area’s ecosystem, have become sites for mass tourism that connect the region to the paradise theme.

Furthermore, signifiers of Tibetan-ness decorate the region’s scenic spots, including the national parks, in an effort to present a picture of a harmonious Shangri-La (Zinda 2014).

The touristic town of Dukezong for example is filled with religious Tibetan markers: such as colorful Tibetan prayer flags, Tibetan chants, and the smell of incense (Hillman 2003). The use of Tibetan Buddhist markers signals to (Western) tourists, who are unfamiliar with its significance, that the Shangri-La region is enshrouded in mysticism and spirituality (Llamas & Berk, 2011). Next to that they provide another connection to Hilton's Shangri-La, for it is said that the story is based on the old Tibetan prophecy of Shambhala: a mystical hidden kingdom in Inner Asia (Bernbaum 2001). The prophecy states that righteous kings, who know the secret teachings of Buddhism, reside and remain hidden in Shambhala until all truth of the world is lost in a war (Bernbaum 2001, 21). Then, the future king of Shambhala will defeat all the evils in the world with a powerful army and establish a peaceful golden age. The resemblance between Shangri-La and Shambhala is quite apparent: both places are peaceful and keep wonderful secrets for a time when the world will be reborn and free from war. The Tibetan Buddhist symbols in the region thus fit with Shangri-La's spiritual narrative. And it is from this perspective that tourists may experience the region's religious elements.

Therefore, at Shangri-La County the features of the landscape and of the ethnic Tibetan population (e.g., religion) are seen by tourists through the lens of paradise. This exotic frame brings into effect that the true meaning of some symbols or practices gets lost because postmodern aspects like simulacrum and fantasy are projected on the environment by tourists (Zhang 2007). To illustrate, in 2002 a 21-meter-tall golden prayer wheel was built in the center of Dukezong in the center of the town that needs a minimum of ten people to spin it (Hillman 2003). The wheel is often spun by tourists counterclockwise, which is the wrong direction according to Tibetan Buddhism practice (Llamas & Belk 2011). This demonstrates that the tourists are unfamiliar with the religious practices concerning prayer wheels and that instead this prayer wheel forms a commodity aimed at enhancing the tourists' fantasies. In terms of Disneyization, the features in Shangri-La can be described as 'depthless ... and depict a problematization of authenticity and reality (Bryman 1999, 43).' How exactly the Shangri-La population and environment relates to the Western sense of authenticity, will be discussed next.

Western tourists' perceptions of Shangri-La

Western tourists often see Tibetan Buddhism as the cure for modern society (MacCannell 1976), for the reason that the lifestyle of monks – who are supposed to be free of desires and possessions – encourages them to live a simple life and to revert back to nature

(Cingcade 1998). Monks therefore play an important role in Shangri-La County's theme and tourism. For example, an American tourist who visited the Songtseling Monastery in Shangri-La stated on TripAdvisor (2017) that '... several of us got to meet monks and our experiences were enriched by those meetings (even if we couldn't communicate).' Some visitors on TripAdvisor (2017) even advise to 'do as monks do' and to 'meditate' when visiting the monastery. In this sense, some tourists experience at the monastery a spiritual performance (Edensor 2001) that shows a form of existential authenticity (Zhu 2012).

In contrast to these positive accounts, another American tourist mentions the following about his experience of monks at Songsteling Monastery in Shangri-La:

'During my time there, I saw many affluent monks riding expensive motor bikes. Although the biggest monastery, with beautiful restoration taking place, this monastery appears to have lost its essence. There is nothing in the gift shop worth purchasing, when I was there it was expensive rubbish. A very disappointing journey, and incredibly expensive tourist trap (TripAdvisor 2017).'

This tourist's expectations of what Shangri-La monks' do were not met; a monk owning a modern product like a motorbike does not express religious simplicity. The difference between the positive and negative evaluations of the monks at Songsteling Monastery can be explained by what MacCannell (2011) calls staged inauthenticity. He argues that tourists' desire for authentic experiences is thwarted by inauthentic staged performances that have been designed more or less exclusively for consumption (MacCannell 2011). When confronted with the backstage of these staged performances, disappointment with reality will thus destroy the tourists' authentic experience.

Furthermore, the American tourist's disappointment with the gift shop reveals an interesting paradox. In that, he measures Shangri-La's experience by how much he liked a tourist facility which is an aspect that actually contributes to the region's transformation into a theme park. Likewise, there are similar accounts that evaluate Songsteling Monastery on TripAdvisor (2017) positively despite calling it touristy. In this sense, it may be that the monks are more essential for the region's authentic character than the environment, and the existence of tourist facilities, because changes in the environment can be blamed by other parties, such as the Chinese government.

Interestingly, where Western tourists blame the commodization of the region to be the cause of Shangri-La having lost its authenticity (MacCannell 1973), they generally do not see themselves play an active role in this process (Howard 2016). In the case of Shangri-La County, Western tourists – and especially supporters of the Tibetan cause – tend to blame the Chinese government for changes in the environment and/or population, for they see the situation between China and Tibet in Cold War terms. After World War II, the interest in Tibet as a land of mystery intensified, for it became the ‘idealized victim of Cold War conquest (Crowe 2013, 1101).’ From this point on, the West felt that Tibet needs to be protected from Communist China’s evil hands destroying their culture. Nonetheless, Tibetan ethnic culture in Shangri-La can said to have changed also by tourists’ own authentic search for the Other (Howard 2016).

The extent in which a tourist is disappointed with the confrontation of inauthenticity at Shangri-La may also largely depend on whether they expect it to be comparable to a theme park. Western tourists seem to have a different attitude towards YEFV. For example, a Canadian tourist wrote the following on TripAdvisor (2017) about YEFV:

‘Once you have past {sic} all the souvenir shops near the main entrance you enter a well laid out cultural educational experience. The 26 minority village settings each have at least one plaque explaining the history of that group and multilingual guides are available ...’

Tourists are generally quite positive about YEFV and evaluate their experience as educational despite its clear inauthenticity. The reason for this may be that if an individual is aware of the fact that the place is a theme park, it is more acceptable that events and locations are staged. Shangri-La is not viewed as a theme park, and such, there is a larger polarization in opinions on TripAdvisor (2017). From this perspective, it would be better for tourists to be more aware of Shangri-La’s fictional frame.

This is especially the case considering that in the beginning of 2014 a fire destroyed about two-thirds of the buildings in Dukezong and the town’s total (re)construction as a theme park seems to be close. Although sights such as the Songsteling temple and golden prayer wheel were spared, the buildings that made up the burnt down touristic center of Dukezong were dearly missed by tourists, as they felt it was ‘deserted’ and that there was ‘not much to see’ (TripAdvisor 2017). According to Xinhua (2016), because of ongoing construction work and a limited number of visitors, the region has been struggling to restore its status as a

popular tourist site ever since. Nevertheless, like other cities in Yunnan that were devastated by natural disasters, Shangri-La is not a lost cause, for these destroyed cities were able to recover by rebuilding and rebranding (Scully 2016). For example, in 1996 parts of the old town of Lijiang were destroyed by an earthquake and successfully rebuilt and popularized by the City government into a commercialized tourist town with new attractions (e.g., Mu family palace) (Goodman 2014). This suggests that the fire incident of Dukezong may have presented the opportunity for the City government to rebuild it into a more attractive tourist location for tourists than before.

It is curious how the town's destruction influenced some tourists' perception of authenticity. Before the fire incident, blogger 'Into the World' (2016) bickered about the Dukezong architecture and authenticity by saying that 'a few traditional houses have been saved from a planned demolition and the original wood beams and rammed-earth wall painstakingly restored', thereby clearly expressing his disappointment in Dukezong's environment. However, after the fire, the blogger mentioned he was sad that he did not take more pictures of this previous unsatisfactory environment and states that 'Yunnan's Shangri-La is no more' (Into the World 2016). The sudden change in attitude reflects an interesting aspect, in that, although the town was considered as inauthentic at first, the fire still destroyed a sense of authenticity that the place had. This inconsistency suggests that the replacement of buildings may not bother tourists so much in the long run because the interpretation of the buildings authenticity is mainly subjective and can thus change over time. In this sense, more features of the Shangri-La theme – like a theme park – can be added to the reconstruction of the region for tourism, despite tourists' current negative evaluations.

Hybrid consumption

The second principle mentioned in the theory of Disneyization is hybrid consumption, previously known as dedifferentiation of consumption (Bryman 1999). It denotes the trend where: 'the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and are increasingly difficult to distinguish (Bryman 2004, 2).' Bryman (2004, 58) argues that the purpose of hybrid consumption is to make people stay longer and spend more money. In tourism, this would mean that the more the needs of tourists are met, the longer they stay, and the more they spend.

Certainly, in the time that the County had transformed into a tourist destination, more activities like shopping, museum, eating, etc., are possible to do now. Furthermore, Shangri-

La's sight attractions have added more and more cash-based activities for tourists. In Potatso National Park, visitors have the opportunity for a fee to enhance their experience by seeing the region while riding on a yak, donkey or horse (Tripadvisor 2017). And at Songsteling Monastery, in contrast to the tradition of keeping monasteries open to pilgrims, ticket sales have been introduced and a gift shop has been established near the entrance (Kolås 2004). Even a visitor center was set up at the monastery, providing tourists with information about all the activities (i.e., different form of consumptions choices) in the area. Australian travel writers Bradford and Salem (2015) disapprove of the existence of the visitor center and argue that it is 'a dead giveaway that the authenticity would be lost.' They further argue that the monastery entrance fee of 115RMB (\approx €15,50) is 'ghastly overpriced' (Bradford and Salem 2015), indicating that the introduction of tickets sometimes lead to tourist dissatisfaction. In this sense, the concept of hybrid consumption is strongly intertwined with the commodization of Shangri-La which in turn can negatively affect consumers' perception of the region's authenticity – adding up to what sways tourists to evaluate Shangri-La as a theme park.

Yet at times, the new forms of consumption do not necessarily have to connect to the regions' local culture for tourists. Dukezong, the center town where commercial outlets color the streets, interestingly offers a wide range of different (Western style) cuisine. A popular restaurant offering both local and Italian food is Helen's Pizza ristorante (TripAdvisor 2017). Reviews from visitors of all nationalities are mainly positive, praising both the food and thanking the Italian owner Marco for his stories about old Shangri-La. For tourists who said to be craving for an authentic experience, eating at Western style restaurants is a contradiction. Thus, international tourists' choices – despite wanting an authentic experience – show that they sometimes prefer to be confronted with familiar consumption goods, which in turn contribute to changes in the environment because of tourist demand.

Western tourists that are fixated on experiencing authentic Tibetan culture (Howard 2016) may extend their trip with homestay. A charitable organization that helps tourists find homestays in China and Shangri-La County is the Hummingfish Foundation. They believe that:

'Seeing the amount of money that is being made with mass tourism in China, some of the local people of China are tempted to tear down there {sic} traditional homes to build what they think the mass tourists wants to see. In the

process, losing their cultural and traditional ways of life forever (Hummingfish Foundation 2016).’

To preserve the traditional lifestyles of the local population, the Foundation reasons that the consumption of homestays among tourists should increase. However, this development would deny locals’ own desire for modernization because the homestay demands of them to keep living simple (e.g., no television). Especially of local youngsters, who grew up with a Chinese education and want to identify themselves as both modern and traditional (Schein 2001). Therefore, what is expressed to be authentic in tourism is still partly formed by what tourists expect to find.

Thus, Shangri-La offers different kind of activities such as eating, shopping, and sleeping – not necessarily authentic – that encourages tourists to participate in hybrid consumption. Tourist locations in Shangri-La have created facilities (e.g., tourist center) and started to offer more (paid) services to seduce tourists to stay longer and to spend more. In comparison to YEFV, hybrid consumption in Shangri-La is more invasive for the ethnic minority population in the sense that it influences their lifestyle at home.

Merchandising

Another strategy to stimulate visitors to consume more, and Bryman’s (2004) third trend, is merchandising. This refers to ‘the promotion and sale of goods in the form of/or bearing copyright images and/or logos, including such products made under license (Bryman 2004, 2).’ By selling goods that are connected to a theme that are only available at a specific location, customers are inclined to buy these goods as a remembrance (e.g., Mickey Mouse). Shangri-La County does not have a mascot (yet). Nonetheless, a mascot is not necessary for a theme park in China because Chinese theme parks typically do not rely on the use of easy visual stereotypes (Stanley 2002).

Most products from the Diqing Prefecture are advertised with aspects of the Shangri-La paradise narrative, of which some are quite different from the region’s traditional goods (e.g., yak meat), such as Shangri-La wine and beer. In 2000, as a response to the increasing tourist interest, grape cultivation and winemaking started in Shangri-La County on large scale by producers such as Shangri-La[®] and Sun Spirit (Lipton 2015). In Shangri-La[®] (2016) company’s marketing, they thanked the region’s ecological environment (e.g., close to the Mekong Three Parallel Rivers and vineyards situated well above the 2,000-meter mark) for

the quality of their wine. They further claim that the variety of grapes used in their wine production was introduced more than a century ago by French Jesuit priests in Cizhong in Dêqên County, the County on the left of Shangri-La (Buckley 2008; Shangri-La® 2016). Although the story of French missionaries building a church and vineyards in Cizhong for their ceremonial wine in the late 19th century is true, it does not have a tranquil end. The missionaries met with a lot of local resistance; their first churches were burnt down and some of them were killed by local outlaws – with the blessing of the Tibetan lamas who did not welcome their mission (Woodhead 2005). Conveniently, this turbulent period is not mentioned in the Shangri-La wine’s advertising. Despite the non-peaceful truth, even foreign companies have gone to Shangri-La to profit from the paradise narrative. In 2012, French wine giant Moët Hennessy had set up its first winery in Adong Village, which is in close proximity to the vines originally planted by the missionaries (Wine Opinion 2015).

Where winemaking in Shangri-La has some historical roots in the region, the production of beer has none. Still, its argument of high quality equally relies on the Shangri-La region’s natural environment (e.g., ‘100 year-old Tibetan Mountain Spring Water’) (Shangri-La beer 2016). The Shangri-La Highland Craft Brewery, founded in 2015 with the cooperation from the local government, also relies on Tibetan motifs in its product marketing. For example, their porter style draught Black Yak, that recently won an award at the prestigious European Beer Star competition (Scally 2016), is advertised on the website as follows:

‘Brewed in honor of the black yak, a symbol of strength and fortitude in Tibetan culture, Black Yak has all the power and spirit of a charging wild beast (Shangri-La Beer 2016).’

Both Tibetan culture and spiritual notions that fit in the frame of the Shangri-La theme are used in the Black Yak beer’s description. Therefore, the marketing of Shangri-La products also rests on features of the local Tibetan population, thereby commodifying their culture and reinforcing the religious and exotic theme of the region.

By representing the Shangri-La wine and beer products as a result of genuine craftsmanship, natural ingredients, etc., a narrative of authenticity is created. Western consumers long for authenticity in most of their consumption choices (e.g., biological food), therefore it is not unusual to find myths advertised in Western consumer culture (e.g., Coconut water). O’Neill, Houtman and Aupers (2014) found that in advertising consumers are

often aware of the fictional status of authenticity claims. Nevertheless, consumers appreciate myths of authenticity in products since such narratives reveal ‘archetypical and perennial wisdoms (O’Neill, Houtman and Aupers 2014).’ In this sense, consuming Shangri-La products and its paradise myth offers consumers an existential authenticity as well.

Apart from selling beer and wine products, or tourist items such as pashmina scarves and cowboy hats (Buckley 2008, 57), there are places selling locally crafted products such as coffee, yak cheese, jewelry and honey. One of the local producers of goods, the Shangri-La Handicraft Center, which aims to protect and promote cultural heritage, handicrafts and sustainable tourism, wishes to develop businesses that secure an income for the local population by emphasizing their products’ origin with a ‘made in Shangri-La’ label and a buy-local-campaign (Llamas and Belk 2011). Thus, ethnic tourism and the Shangri-La narrative may help locals to revitalize traditions, promote arts and crafts, and present themselves positively (Cohen 1988).

Thus, merchandising in Shangri-La County is different from a theme park where mascots or logos are being sold, for it is predominantly the paradise narrative of the environment and the population that is used in the marketing strategy of products from this region. At YEFV there is no mascot (e.g., Mickey Mouse), but a logo and products based on ethnic minorities are being sold, which suggests that the principle of merchandising as described in the theory of Disneyization partly applies in a Chinese context.

Performative Labor

Finally, the last principle in Disneyization is performative labor, once known as emotional labor (Bryman 1999, 34), and entails ‘the growing tendency for frontline service work to be viewed as a performance, especially one in which the deliberate display of a certain mood is seen as part of the labor involved in service work (Bryman 2004, 2).’ In theme parks such as Disneyland, employees have to act in accordance with a script which demands of them to control their emotions and behave in a socially-desired manner (e.g., ever-smiling). Since there is not one single organization that coordinates all of Shangri-La’s local citizens’ behavior, the principle of performative labor may not be the same as in a theme park. On the other hand, the start of the tourist industry and the influx of Han Chinese entrepreneurs and workers (Hillman 2013) suggest that performances and daily activities are becoming increasingly staged to entertain tourists (MacCannell 2011).

Tourism-related establishments in Shangri-La are often in the hands of non-locals. Especially Han Chinese are found to have better chances in finding a job or to explore managerial and entrepreneurial opportunities (Llamas and Belk 2011), whereas locals are frequently denied for tourist jobs because of their lack of skills and/or education (Hillman 2013). Even low skilled occupations such as housekeeping, often go to non-locals (Llamas and Belk 2011). And although there are some vocational schools in the County (that are the equivalent of high school), the education leaves much to be desired (Hillman 2013). Therefore, the labor market in Shangri-La has become stratified. This means that the increase in Diqing prefecture's GDP, due to tourism, does not necessarily translate into a much higher living standard for everyone.

Yet, locals also profit of the tourism development in Shangri-La County, in that they are now able to enjoy a lifestyle that is both rural and urban. Many families benefit from the newly available urban services (e.g. infrastructure), while still continuing to live in Tibetan style houses with courtyards (Hillman 2013). Nonetheless, some locals have profited more than others. For example, families who owned property in or around Dukezong became rich, as the value of the lease for their houses increased with the years (Hillman, 2013). But local officials have profited the most by selling land rights – which they acquired from local farmers for a relatively low price – to private developers (Hillman, 2013). These private developers, who own almost all of the travel agencies, hotels and bus companies in Shangri-La, are often either Han Chinese or foreign multinational firms (e.g., Moët Hennessey). It can thus be said that the real winners of the tourism boom in Shangri-La are the officials and non-locals, in turn; they have the most influence on Shangri-La's representation in the tourist industry. The development of tourist activities makes it more difficult for tourists to distinguish whether activities of ethnic minorities are staged or not. One such activity is dance performances, which will be discussed next.

Ethnic dancing in Shangri-La and YEFV

Every evening in Dukezong from seven to eight pm, locals gather in front of Guishan Park (in the proximity of the largest golden prayer wheel) to dance in a circle on upbeat Tibetan music. Everyone is welcome to take part in this performance, in what the Finnish blogger Roman (2014) calls a 'popular public dancing {event} to the neo rave take of Traditional music.' Most visitors on TripAdvisor (2017) are quite positive about this event, which was interestingly a 'cultural' practice introduced in 2006 (Llamas and Belk 2011),

suggesting that it was invented for the sake of tourism. The dance practice in Shangri-La shows similarities with the performances at YEFV, in that the public can join in the performance. Furthermore, performers at both locations do not always behave in a socially desired manner which may be a crushing revelation for some Western tourists; one individual for example complained that YEFV employees ‘haven’t learned the essential Disneyland skill of smiling all the time (TripAdvisor 2017)!’ It is found that Chinese do not appreciate smiling service as much as Westerners (Erb & Ong 2016). Thus, in context of Chinese theme parks, Bryman’s principle of performative labor, wherein ‘deliberate display of a certain mood’ is essential (Bryman 2004, 2), does not account.

Nevertheless, the performances (e.g., dance, songs and folktales) at YEFV are more controlled. For example, an ethnic minority dancer stated that she felt like a barbarian because in her group performance they were instructed to ‘keep swinging their long hair ... {and} shout like animals’ (Yang 2011, 574). Dance performances are found to ‘re-shape the mainstream imaginations of embodied ethnic cultures in the era of China’s touristic consumerism (Li 2012, 67),’ and are therefore powerful instruments in conveying an image or message. The modified performance at YEFV represents the message of internal orientalism wherein ethnic minorities are exoticized in comparison to the ‘normative’ bodies of tourists, of whom the majority are Han urbanites (Li 2012, 74). In contrast, the representation of dancing in Shangri-La County seems to be not only in favor of Han Chinese. Diqing Prefecture’s emergence as a leading Tibetan area was accompanied by relatively liberal social and cultural policies, in that religious authorities are directly involved in tourism development and have helped to ensure that representations of Tibetan culture are not drastically changed by commercial incentives and the fantasies of visitors (Hillman 2010). This suggests that in Shangri-La County, ethnic minorities have more influence on decisions surrounding the presentation of their culture than at YEFV.

Furthermore, tourism can also reinforce ethnic consciousness and revitalize some cultural traditions (Cole 2016, 14); such as the making of black pottery in the village of Tandui (to the north of Shangri-La) (Hillman 2003). In some cases, the sense of community among minorities and villages produced by ethnic consciousness can become a form of leverage. Llamas and Berk (2014) found for example that when a manager of Gyalthang Dzong Hotel wanted to make a deal with an ethnic village to provide tours for their guests, the village would only comply when the management would involve other villages as well. Ethnic identity, (re)created through tourism, has thus given the local groups new political (and

potential economic) capital to manipulate: identity and pride are important steps to empowerment (Cole 2016).

Thus, it seems that state officials and locals influence the representation of ethnic minorities in Shangri-La County. The actions of ethnic minorities in these performances are however less controlled than at YEFV and not entirely compatible with Bryman's definition of performative labor, which suggests that this principle of Disneyization is only partially accounted for in Shangri-La County because the lack of smiling service fits within the context of a Chinese theme park.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Shangri-La is a Western and fictional concept, the Chinese government officially recognized Zhongdian County, in the Sino Tibetan region, as its location. Their decision was driven by local officials' plea for developing the region for tourism – as to increase the region's GDP and to gain status – and their own strategy of nation building where Tibet is more positively included to China through Shangri-La's exoticness. The structure in the Shangri-La region have been constructed or renovated as to accommodate the increasing tourism and to create an image fitting to that of paradise. This in turn made some tourists to express that Shangri-La has lost its authenticity and has turned into a theme park. In the current essay, it was explored whether it can be said that the Shangri-La region has transformed into a theme park or not.

Even though logically speaking Shangri-La can never authentically be(come) paradise since it is fictional, tourists are motivated to visit Shangri-La County, which indicates that they experience it as a phantasmal destination. This means that the imaginative narrative of Shangri-La County – formed by the individual himself, his environment and the media – creates a hyper-reality in which the location is experienced as 'real' and enjoyable by the tourist through postmodern features such as simulation and simulacrum. Theme parks are also well known for their creation of a hyper-reality. Thus, the moment the region became associated with Shangri-La's paradise narrative; it has become quite similar to a theme park in terms of tourists' expectation, perception and experience.

Interestingly, although Chinese and Western tourists both wish for the population to stay underdeveloped in their discourse of (internal) orientalism of experiencing the area, they have different reasons, in that, Westerners wish that the population remains backward for their

search for authenticity and Chinese want to feel modern in comparison. Conveniently, their overlap in need of an Other, also overlaps with the Chinese state's discourse of building a nation, wherein ethnic minorities are portrayed as backward but colorful variations of Chinese culture. Although ethnic minorities are both exoticized and objectified in the state's portrayal, they are playing along because it offers them a space to project their proud identity. In this sense, all involved parties, except ethnic minorities who actually also want to modernize, mainly wish for the local population to be presented as backward, feminine and authentic.

However, the perception of authenticity plays a bigger role for Western tourist, which makes them more susceptible to brand Shangri-La a theme park when they are confronted with what they find 'inauthentic'. What is considered (in)authentic in tourists perspective is however constructive and thus quite flexible. Personal characteristics, such as if you are pro-Tibetan, plays an important role in whether an individual will remark that Shangri-La has become a paradise. Sometimes, the thin boundaries in what makes a place a tourist scam are paradoxical, for in some cases, Westerners own demand or preference for a type of consumption good such as food, indicates that the location is also changing to accommodate their needs.

To test whether Shangri-La is objectively a theme park, the four principles (theming, hybrid consumption, merchandizing and performative labor) of Bryman's theory of Disneyization were used. In light of theming, Shangri-La County has transformed into a theme park because the paradise theme exoticized the regions' landscape, population and religion. Moreover, it is the perception of these features through the exotic frame of Shangri-La's narrative that makes it comparable to theming of a theme park. Hybrid consumption was also found to be present in Shangri-La County as tourists are offered various forms of consumption choices, such as shopping and eating, that would make them stay longer and spend more money. In terms of merchandizing, although there is no mascot and logo in Shangri-La, the products from the region are marketed with the Shangri-La narrative. Lastly, performative labor in Shangri-La County as defined by Bryman does not apply. However, if you take into consideration how theme parks in Chinese context function, such as no smiling service and no internationalist universalism, performative labor partially applies to Shangri-La County because when compared to YEFV (a Chinese theme park), the local population seem to have more influence on how they represent themselves. In short, in view of Bryman's theory of Disneyization, with keeping in mind the Chinese setting, Shangri-La County is

comparable to a theme park. This suggests that Disneyization, as defined by Bryman, is not universal.

Thus, on both an objective and subjective level one can argue that Shangri-La County is a theme park. First, various producers have largely changed the environment due to processes such as theming and hybrid consumption to increase the region's attractiveness for tourism, thereby making the area objectively inauthentic in some ways. Secondly, Shangri-La's narrative changed the tourists' frame by which they perceive, expect and experience the region, and it is through this paradise frame – that is based on fiction – that Shangri-La can only be perceived as a theme park. In this view, it is possible to provide a tourist destination that can be called paradise, for it is predominantly a subjective experience.

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