The Mobilization of "Nature":

Green Collaborations, Anti-Mountaineering, and the Yunnan Great Rivers Project

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Introduction

In a recent article on the politics of biodiversity conservation in Latin America, Arturo Escobar has observed that the ideology of naturalism -- essentially the belief in an external and untouched nature, outside of human intention and human intervention -- remains strong among scholars and activists working to protect biodiversity and indigenous communities in tropical rainforests. He writes, "The humid forests of the tropics are, with good reason, perceived as the most natural form of nature left on earth, inhabited by the most natural people (indigenous peoples) possessing the most natural knowledge of saving nature (indigenous knowledge)" (Escobar 1997: 40-41). In this paper I argue this form of naturalism which links places of nature with particular kinds of peoples and their knowledges is alive and well in the People's Republic, despite that fact that we now seem to be living in worlds that are radically "after nature, as Escobar (1999) has put it. Yet I argue that this form of what we might call "indigenous naturalism" is a contested discourse in China, one that must be understood in relationship to the new international environmental presence in China. Since the mid-1990s, a myriad of international organizations, agencies, and multi-lateral institutions have set up shop in the People's Republic, arriving with dollars and dreams of saving nature and locating alternative forms of knowledge, which are often seen to be rooted in particular localities and in the cultural traditions of ethnic minority cultures. The contested discourse of indigenous naturalism also owes much to tensions within the Chinese party and state about just how to govern, and develop, China's ethnic minority border zones, especially in what is now referred to as the "underdeveloped" west region. Government bureaus, at all levels of the state apparatus, are now seemingly committed to a course of development in which the gaze and pocket book of the tourist will be forever wedded to the civilized scenic spot. At the same time, young and not so young activists and scholars, many of whom have traveled abroad or who have found the means to attend international congresses and link up with indigenous rights and environmental activists from around the world, are arguing that the future of the nation (and maybe the planet) is invariably linked to the protection of biological life.

Any survey of the plethora of new "green" organizations on China's college campuses, the emergence of new academic or popular journals devoted to championing "sustainable" development, the many multi-million dollar projects that have come to China since the mid-1990s to deal with everything from deforestation to pollution to desertification, and so on, reveals that increasing numbers of people China are invested, albeit in varying ways and to varying degrees, in the survival of biological life, and especially in the protection of biodiversity. This interest in China's biological resources no doubt owes much to the ways in which China's intellectuals and policy makers have drawn critical attention to the devastating environmental effects of the mass mobilizations of the Great Leap Forward, the massive deforestation on the Tibetan Plateau, and the engineering disasters of numerous dam projects in the 1950s and 1960s; it also owes something to critiques of the effects of the market reforms on China's fragile environment. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that no discussion of the relationship between science and capital in 1990s China, a relationship that I assert is key to any understanding of the particularities of China's so-called post-socialist market reforms, can proceed without considering how the relationship between human communities and nature is being rethought. Take, for example, this opening passage from Judith Shapiro's recently published book, *Mao's War Against Nature*:

> … few cases of environmental degradation so clearly reveal the human and environmental costs incurred when human beings, particularly those who determine policy, view themselves as living in an oppositional relationship to nature – as well as to each other – and behave accordingly. The relationship between humans and nature under Mao is so transparent and extreme that it clearly indicates a link between abuse of people and abuse of the natural environment … coercive state behavior such as forcible relocations and suppression of intellectual and political freedoms contributed directly to a wide range of environmental problems ranging from deforestation and desertification to ill-conceived engineering projects that degraded major river courses… today, at a time when it has become crucial to adopt more sustainable modes of human activity, the cautionary example of the Maoist "war against nature" may shed light on the human-nature relationship in other periods and parts of the world (Shapiro 2001:xii).

Shapiro's critique of the Maoist environmental record imagines a post-Mao era in which the biological and ecological sciences, if properly harnessed and removed from the domain of the ideological, will be able to produce more sustainable modes of human activity. While it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to explore what a non-ideological science might look like in China, what interests me here is a development she hints at the conclusion of her book: the role international non-governmental organizations (so-called INGOs) have been playing in debates about the relationship between development and conservation since the mid-1990s. The Ford Foundation, the World Wildlife Fund, Oxfam, the Japan Environmental Protection Center, and many other small and larger organizations are all major actors in the development and conservation scene today, with operations in major cities such as Shanghai and

Beijing, and a plethora of projects spread out across the expanse of China.[1] As is well known, these organizations are under tight control and they often work in conjunction with Chinese based NGOs and other organizations working in China's newly emergent non-profit sector.[2] The Chinese government has called on these international agencies to assist in a wide range of services, from the retraining and reemployment of unemployed state workers, to the formation of new economically viable production cooperatives in a number of different industries, to the alleviation of poverty in rural areas (Raab 1996, Rozelle 2000). INGOs, as well as many Chinese non-governmental organizations, have also been involved in the search for new knowledges or ways of life silenced during the Maoist period, or perhaps long ignored by scholars and government officials because these knowledges reeked of the "feudal." In China's rural sectors, for example, NGOs have been working with county and provincial governments to promote traditional farming systems, study what are often termed "local" forms of ecological and environmental knowledge, and manage the effects of new forms of development (such as tourism, timber-clearing and other forms of resource depletion) on local communities and their cultures.

For the last two and a half years I have been doing research on the history of environmental activism and "green" development in northwest Yunnan, with a particular interest in the relationship between international environmental projects and Chinese environmental organizations.[3] This eventually led me to a

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[1] One of the newest actors in the conservation and development scene in China is The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), a multi-million dollar endeavor funded by Conservation International, The Global Environmental Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. This project aims to popularize WWF's ecosystem profiling model, and to fund and link conservation projects to the creation of civil society, which for the fund essentially means identifying autonomous organizations outside of the control and reach of the state, which has proved difficult given that most Chinese NGOs have complex ties to party and government bureaucracies. For a preliminary discussion, see Litzinger, "The Bio-Politics of Eco-Profiling," forthcoming.

[2] Scholars and policy makers in China have begun to debate the political implications of this kind of international conservation and developmental presence. One of the most important points of contention has been the diminishing role of the Chinese Communist Party in defining the trajectory of social and economic change in China. And a new range of debate has emerged over the Central government's 1999 announcement of the Western Development Strategy, the *xibu dakaifa zhanlue*, to say nothing of China's entrance into the World Trade Organization. *China Development Brief* provides one of the best Chinese and English-language sources on these issues, and the many international and Chinese-national NGO and multi-lateral projects in China. See www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com, where one can also access the organization's August 2001 report, *250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making*.

[3] My research on this project began in the summer of 2000, when I attended an international conference in Kunming, Yunnan hosted by the Kunming-based Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (see their website at www.cbik.com). Thanks to Xu Jianchu and Andreas Wilkes for this opportunity. I returned to Yunnan in October of 2000 to attend a conference organized by The Nature Conservancy in Deqin County, Yunnan, called the Meilixueshan Conservation and Development International Workshop, which I turn to below. Funding for these trips was provided by a Duke University faculty enhancement grant for interdisciplinary studies. From September 2001 – July 2002, I conducted additional research on The Nature Conservancy and other conservation and development projects in Yunnan, focusing primarily on Zhongdian and Deqin Counties, as well as on the history of European and American botanical exploration in northwest Yunnan, the contemporary discourse of Shangri-la, and the politics and processes

large-scale endeavor known as the Yunnan Great Rivers Project (YGRP); a collaborative venture between the Yunnan Provincial government and the Washington DC based environmental organization, The Nature Conservancy (TNC). From September 2001 to July 2002, I spent almost a year making a nuisance of myself in TNC offices in Kunming, traveling with and interviewing TNC staff, buying beers and noodles for tourists from Japan, the US, Israel, Beijing and Shanghai and talking to them about why they find this land so attractive, interviewing government officials and Chinese and Tibetan scholars who have worked with – or refused to work with -- various phases of the YGRP, and wandering through various TNC project sites in the attempt to understand how village residents view the landscapes in which they live and the new talk of conservation and development that is now a part of their everyday lives. Northwest Yunnan is indeed a remarkable place, historically complex for its inter-ethnic relations, culturally bizarre for its hybrid worlds of contemporary consumerism and Buddhist spirituality, and stunning for its natural landscapes, its river gorges, snow peaks, glaciers, flowers, mushrooms, medicinal herbs and, of course, its forests. It is a mountaineer's dream, a backpacker's playground, and once again, as it was during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, it is reemerging as a botanical laboratory, arguably one of the world's most diverse biological eco-zones. Yet northwest Yunnan is also a zone of divergent and competing regimes of nature, where conservation projects, development agendas, activist-oriented non-government organizations, and metropolitan fantasies about indigenous peoples and pristine natural formations are interacting and often colliding with complex and long histories of socialist and post-socialist land use.

This is also a region where new forms of environmental collaboration are being imagined and tried out. These forms of collaboration cut across the political boundaries of nations, provinces, prefectures, and counties, across the boundaries of different kinds of ecosystems, as well as across the boundaries of economic and ethnic difference that have long existed between lowland and upland peoples in northwest Yunnan.[4] The unprecedented presence of organizations such as TNC, to say nothing of the World Bank, the Asia Development Bank, the Global Environmental Forum and many other multi-lateral agencies, has not only enabled what we might see as a new form of global environmental imperialism; these diverse actors, with their commitments to poverty alleviation, alternative forms of development, civil society, participatory research methods, etc., have also enabled new forms of trans-local networking and collaboration. What new discourses about nature and what forms of environmental knowledge are being produced in these spaces of collaboration? Do these spaces mark the emergence of new forms of post-socialist grass-roots environmental activism, where, as some might argue, the spaces of civil society

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of mass tourism and eco-tourism. Funding for this research was provided by a Fulbright faculty research grant.

[4] My current thinking on the politics of environmental collaboration owes much to the emerging literature on critical environmental anthropology. For a small and selective sampling of this literature, see Brosius (1999), Brosius and Tsing (1998), Escobar (1999), Neumann (1998), Peet and Watts (1996), Rocheleau (1996), Sivaramakrishnan (1999, 2000), (Tsing (2001). For a discussion of new transnational activism, see Keck and Sikkink's (1998).

are finally being etched out in the landscape of authoritative China? Or, do they simply return us, as Ramachandra Guha put it some years ago, to the age-old split between an "ecology of the affluent" and an "environmentalism of the poor?" How in short do we read and write about these moments and spaces of collaboration and their limits, and what do they tell us about the future of "nature" in the People's Republic?

To explore these questions, I begin below by providing a general discussion of the YGRP and its relationship to some of the changes that have come to northwest Yunnan in the last decade or so. I then turn to a workshop organized by TNC in the fall of 2000, which aimed to preserve one of the region's most "sacred" mountain peaks, Kawagebo, and which eventually produced a protest petition presented to China's State Council demanding a ban on mountaineering. Here I focus on the refusal of one Chinese social scientist to participate in the workshop and to sign the petition presented to the state council. He contested and eventually refused to work with TNC again in the future because of the way in which they used the People's Liberation Army's 1950s mapping systems to, in his view, incorrectly name this mountain peak. This, he argued, marginalized the Tibetan system of naming the mountain and essentially denied them their rights to use and protect their "intellectual property." After this, I turn to a brief discussion of another protest several years prior, which TNC was not involved in, that aimed to expose illegal logging schemes in the Baimang Snow Mountain Nature Reserve, part of the massive range that forms the boundary between the Mekong and Yangtze watersheds in northwest Yunnan.

A Sense of Snow

In 1998, the US based environmental non-governmental organization, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), began to undertake a massive conservation and development project in collaboration with the Yunnan Provincial government in the border regions of northwest Yunnan Province. Known as the Yunnan Great Rivers Project (YGRP), the project area encompasses northwest Yunnan's fifteen counties and cities in four prefectures, specifically Deqin, Zhongdian (now Xianggelila), and Weixi counties in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gongshan, Fugong, Lushui and Weixi counties in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Dali, Bingchuan, Jianchuan, Heqing, Eryuan, and Yulong counties in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, and Ninglang and Lijiang counties in Lijiang Prefecture. In all, this is an area of 68,908 square kilometers, accounting for 17.48% of Yunnan's total area with a population of 3.094 million, or 7.47% of Yunnan's total area.[5] TNC's first project site was in Lijiang County, not far from the now bustling city of Lijiang and the "old town" which has become famous in recent years as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In fact, the origins of the project can be traced to the towering snow peak, the Yulong (Jade Dragon) Snow Mountain, that hovers above the Lijiang valley to the north of the town. The "father" (as he is sometimes affectionately referred to by members of the TNC

[5] These figures are taken from the Conservation and Development Action Plan for Northwest Yunnan, finalized by the now defunct Joint Project Office (a collaborative effort by TNC staff and former Yunnan government officials and several Kunming-based ecological and forestry scientists), prepared on March 9, 2001 and presented to the Yunnan Provincial government for consideration in their five year plan.

staff in Yunnan) of the project is Vickrom Kromadit, a Bangkok real estate developer who first traveled to Yunnan in 1993 in the hope of developing a ski resort on one of the upper reaches of Yulong Mountain.[6]

Fueled by dreams of further riches and inspired by the bustling southeast Asian economy in the early 1990s, Kromadit wanted to identify recreational sites for the new Asian middle class, According to him, Asia's new money rich were discovering a new love of nature and a new found desire to escape the sweltering heat of Bangkok and other major urban centers in southeast Asia. He hired Steve Mikol of the Colorado-based Conservation Development Corporation to conduct a feasibility study, who found, much to Kromadit's disappointment, that the area's climate, altitude, and lack of snow fall would not support a ski resort. Deterred yet still enchanted by the region's astonishing peaks, valley's and forested terrain, Mikol recommended the building of a national park. A long time member of The Nature Conservancy, Mikol eventually tracked down Carol Fox, who worked in the development office of TNC's Hawaii office, and is TNC's China project director. Kromadit upped the stakes by providing a six-figure donation to get the project going. In March of 1997, TNC's Board of Governors instructed the TNC staff to proceed as advisors. By November of 1997 China's first international environmental non-governmental organization, the Institute for Human Ecology, introduced the TNC advisors, which included Hank Paulsen, a Goldman Sachs executive and the co-chair of TNC's Asia/ Pacific Council, to top officials in China. Within a year TNC opened an office in Kunming. Four years later, in the spring of 2001, Hank Paulsen organized a meeting between Ed Norton, the chief advisor on the YGRP and several other staff members to meet with Jiang Zemin. This meeting was broadcast on national television in China, with Jiang giving an open endorsement to the Yunnan Great Rivers Project and TNC's efforts to protect China's biological resource in northwest Yunnan and other places on the Tibetan plateau.

The stated mission of the YGRP is "to preserve the biological and cultural diversity of northwest Yunnan Province and promote the long-term economic well being of its citizens by successfully integrating conservation and economic goals through compatible development strategies." What this has meant in practice has been the designation of portfolio areas of high biodiversity and cultural value; the creation of a mandate for the protection of biodiversity and indigenous culture in law, regulation, and policy; the development and implementation of management plans for protected areas (specifically for existing nature reserves), the creation of a system of financing to support the protection of biodiversity and cultural resources, and the establishment of a program to train natural and cultural resource managers. From 1998 – 2000, most of TNC's energies were devoted to building "biodiversity portfolios." This first phase of the project, completed in January 2000, identified four major conservation targets in the proposed site: 1) black golden monkeys; 2) Class 1-2 animal species; 3) Class 1-3 protected plant species; and 4) and vegetation sites such as alpine meadows, broadleaf forests, and mixed forests. The identification

[6] For an account of this early phase of the project, see Ron Geatz, "Great Rivers of Yunnan: Conservation in a Changing China," published by Tibet Environmental Watch and available at www.twe.org

of these conservation targets was based on the collaborative efforts of ecological and forestry scientists, local conservation managers from prefecture and county planning commissions, forestry bureaus, and nature reserves, as well as from various provincial-levels conservation and development agencies, including the China Construction Bureau. The second phase of the project, which began in the fall of 2000, aimed to document the cultural diversity of the region. For this research, TNC hired Chinese and ethnic minority social scientists associated with the Yunnan Social Sciences Academy, Yunnan University, or the Yunnan School of Forestry. After a brief training program in field research techniques and participatory research, these scholars carried out quite extensive research in Tibetan, Naxi, and Yi villages throughout the region, focusing on land use practices, the history of the timber industry, non-timber products, and religious and ritual practice, and other research topics.[7]

The general project site is located in northwest Yunnan, a region often referred to in Mandarin Chinese as *dianxibei*. This is where the eastern flank of the Himalayas turns abruptly south, where the administrative boundaries of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, and the country of Myanmar (Burma) meet in the heart of what geographers call the Hengduan Mountains. This is the region where European and American botanists and explorers such as Frank Kingdon Ward and Joseph Rock collected plant life during the first part of the twentieth century, when the first topographic maps and photographs of the region were produced and published in journals such as *National Geographic Magazine* and the *Geological Journal*.[8] This is where the People's Liberation Army crossed the mountains in the mid-1950s, as they attempted to find alternative routes into Tibet when Kham resistance in western Sichuan thwarted their military advance. This is where a major highway was build in the late 1950s, also by the People's Liberation Army, linking by dirt and gravel road the Yangtze River and Mekong watersheds, a highway over twenty years in the making that allows one today to drive overland from Kunming to Lhasa.[9] More recently, this is where international environmental organizations – such as World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Conservation International – have located the world's most recent "biodiversity hotspot."[10]

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[7] For the most part, these reports have not yet been published, nor are they widely circulated, in large part because they remain the property of TNC. Because the TNC staff in Kunming agreed to my idea to write a book about their project, I was given access to many of these reports and was eventually able to photocopy over 2000 pages of documents. In addition to many of these reports, I now have in my possession research proposals and financial contracts between TNC and Yunnan based scholars and government officials. These financial contracts reveal how TNC, as well as other international NGOs, have significantly raised the cost of collaborative research in northwest Yunnan.

[8] See Rock 1926; Ward 1916.

[9] The Western Region Development Project has recently begun to invest in transportation and communication links on this road. The total investment in 2002 was around 400,000,000 RMB. A large portion of this went to paving the Zhongdian – Deqin railroad, while other monies were devoted to community infrastructure projects. Another major project during 2001-2002 entailed laying new communications lines between Zhongdian and Deqin County, a project funded by the National Military Defense Bureau.

From the perspective of these and organizations such as TNC, the rich biological resources of the region are now under threat by the advancing forces of mass tourism, by excessive firewood collection by village women who refuse to use the new biogas converters that have been placed in many villages, and by developers as far away as Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong who want to build mountain resorts for China's new rich. Finally, this is the land of Shangri-la, the place where James Hilton's 1939 novel, *Lost Horizon*, has been rediscovered by enterprising tourism officials and communist capitalists, where a colonial image of a lost Tibetan kingdom has been given new life in a post-socialist imaginary world in which "man and nature" (to quote from a popular ubiquitous environmental poster seen throughout contemporary China) are to march ahead together into a future of prosperity and sustainability.[11]

Northwest Yunnan has thus become, since the mid-1990s, a place of intense, almost obsessive activity, all centering around the desire to both consume and protect nature. It is a place in which a range of people and organizations, in China and beyond, are now crisscrossing the region, setting up conservation projects, organizing participatory training sessions, starting eco-tourism businesses (my favorite is called Wild China,[12] owned by the Chinese wife of the Washington Post's Beijing correspondent), shooting videos and taking photographers, hiring SUVS, paying radically inflated rates to translators and research collaborators, and reshaping the meanings of places. Traveling through the region, it is indeed difficult not to come away with a sense that northwest Yunnan is a place for nature (here I struggle with the correct preposition – should it be "of" nature or "for" nature?). Here one finds the world's most diverse array of rhododendrons, a plethora of medicinal herbs, plants, and mushrooms, thick forests of fir, pine, hemlock, and oak. It is a world of narrow, impassable river gorges, of towering peaks, of glaciers that fall from the sides of mountains and can be seen miles away from strategically located "scenic spots." The Nature Conservancy was, quite understandably, attracted to this excess of nature.[13] The name, "Yunnan Great Rivers Project," is actually derived from the fact that the four great rivers of Asia -- the Yangtze, Salween, Irawaddy, and Mekong -- flow off the Tibetan plateau within seventy-five kilometers of each other. The topographic extremes are immense, with an elevation range in the TNC's project site of 5,000 meters. Locally, elevations can change 3,000 to 4,000 meters within 10 to 20 kilometers.

Coincident with this extreme topographic gradient is a similarly steep environmental gradient. Compressed within short distances are subtropical

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[10] For discussions, see Mittermeier et al. 1998, Myers et al. 2000, Stattersfield et al. 1998, Olson and Dinerstein 1998.

[11] Zhongdian County was officially renamed Shangri-la County in May of 2002. For a discussion of the fascination with Hilton and the entire Shangri-la mystique, see Tang Shijie (2000). For a more recent collection of essays on the politics of "late development" in the Tibetan regions of northwest Yunnan, see Wang Gelin and Zhu Ling (2002).

[12] Visit www.wildchina.com for a taste.

[13] For a discussion by the senior ecologist TNC ecologist on the project, see Moseley 2000, 2001.

ecosystems in the canyon bottoms, rising through temperate, boreal, and arctic-alpine life zones to permanent snow. Glaciers descending off Kawagebo Peak (6,740 m), the highest summit in the Meili Snow Mountain range and the highest in Yunnan, reach the lowest elevation of any in China, nearly terminating in a subtropical eco-zone. Along these rivers and up the mountains valleys grow 10,000 of Yunnan's plant species. 500 bird species live in and migrate through the area. The project site is also the home of the snub-nosed monkey and the endangered black-necked crane. The Yunnan Great Rivers Project site is huge, about 66,000 square kilometers, approximately the size of Ireland and eight times the size of Yellowstone National Park, and it covers, as I mentioned above, fifteen counties in four prefectures. Following Kromadit's lead and the recommendations of the Conservation Development Corporation, the dream is to eventually establish a national park, most probably modeled on Yellowstone, which would allow visitors to enjoy the region's stunning landscapes, its glaciated mountain peaks, its abundant flora and fauna, and to observe first hand how Tibetan and other "indigenous" peoples, with their cultural ideas of sacred landscapes, have protected and managed the region's biological resources for centuries. Northwest Yunnan is thus a world where the European colonial, the Chinese imperial, the socialist modern, and the global collide, where fiction has been turned into fact, where nature meets culture in fantasies of indigenous stewardship, and where the biological and ecological sciences are being mobilized to save the region and save the planet.

Anti-Mountaineering and the Politics of Collaboration

In 1998, record floods on the Yangtze River basin killed at least 3000 people, devastated large tracts of China's most fertile countryside, and displaced or affected some 230 million people. Initially, the flooding was blamed on the heavy rains caused by El Nino and the abundant snowmelt from a heavy winter in Tibet and Qinghai Province. Some months later another explanation emerged in China. Government officials began to argue that the floods were caused by years of extensive deforestation on the Tibetan Plateau, and in particular in the vicinity of the headwaters of the six major Asian rivers, an area that includes the proposed site for Yunnan Great Rivers Project. These officials recognized that centuries of conversion to grazing lands and small-scale fuel wood harvesting impacted the forests of the Plateau. But they also argued that it was not until the 1950s, and the advent of intensive industrial logging, that the forests of the Plateau began to be seriously affected. It is today generally acknowledged in China that since the 1950s forest ecosystems on the Tibetan plateau have been under intense pressure from state-run enterprises. State forestry management laws and regulations prescribed a sustainable quota system, in that annual timber harvests were never to exceed annual forest growth. This quota system was never really implemented in practice, in large part because of development pressures or political events, such as the Great Leap. When timber markets were opened in the early 1990s, there was a lack of effective management to deal with the market-driven over-harvesting by the many logging companies owned by different levels of the government, nor were there effective mechanisms in place to insure that state and collective owned forests were replanted. A 1986 study by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Nepal and the Beijing-based Commission for the Integrated Survey of Natural Resources found that the rate of cutting in parts of Sichuan province were nearly three times the

rate of regrowth. In western Sichuan alone, 42,000 square miles of clear-cut land have been subjected to severe soil erosion (for a discussion, see Clarke 1999). Other studies have argued that the problem of over-harvests, combined with forest and other land converted to agriculture, are the main causes for the loss of 85% of old-growth forest cover along the Upper Yangtze during this period.[14]

The Chinese government's ban on timber exploitation on the Tibetan Plateau in 1999 has transformed the economy of northwest Yunnan. The focus has turned to the majestic mountains, the stunning landscapes, the glaciers, the flora and fauna of the region. These landscapes have been marked as the new objects to be exploited, if only through the act of gazing from an overlook or from a hotel balcony; developing the upland regions of northwest Yunnan is geared toward creating scenic spots so that tourists can stand apart from these landscapes, photograph them, and enjoy them as objects for pure aesthetic contemplation. Nonetheless, one of the stated agendas of the YGRP project is to help the government come up with alternative sources of economic development. In fact, economic development was one of the main bargaining points insisted upon by the Yunnan provincial government in the first phases of the project, for government officials argued that because of the ubiquity of villages designated below the poverty level, conservation could never be successful without some measure of economic growth.

In responding to the logging ban in northwest Yunnan and its effects on local economies, TNC has promoted eco-tourism (or more controlled and managed forms of mass tourism) as an alternative to the now defunct timber industry. It should not surprise us that much attention has turned to the glaciated and snow-capped peaks in Deqin County, which form a north to south boundary between the Mekong and Salween (Nu Jiang) gorge country. At the center of this attention, and one of the key sites for protection in the Yunnan Great Rivers Project, is the 6740-meter glaciated peak called Meili Snow Mountain (or Mt. Khabadkarpo, as the Tibetans in the area refer to it, and which sometimes appears in English-language texts as Kawa Karpo).[15] Kawagebo is considered by Tibetans all over the world to be a sacred mountain, and it properly belongs to that classification of mountains known by Tibetans as *neri*, literally translated as "mountain abode. Mountains such as Kawagebo are considered to be places of residence and activity of certain important deities. This means that not only is the deity thought to dwell in or in the vicinity of the mountain as a separate entity, but also that the deity is seen to be the equivalent to the mountain itself (Huber 1999). Pilgrims from all over China visit this mountain every year to circumambulate the peak, in what is essentially a 12-15 day trek which crosses over three 5000 meter passes, including the well-known

[14] The literature on the forestry industry and its relation to resource depletion on the Upper Yangtze is too huge to quote in full. For a brief discussion, see "Ecosystem Profile: Mountains of Southwest China" on the website of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (http://www.cepf.org). For a broader historical perspective, see Richardson (1990). For a view from the perspective of repeat photography, see Moseley (n.d.).

[15] Kawa Karpo is the name used, for example, in Toni Huber's (1999) recent study of popular pilgrimage in the Himalayan border district of Tsari in southeastern Tibet.

Do-ka-la, memorialized by Frank Kingdon Ward in his book, *Mystery Rivers of Tibet*.[16]

Kawagebo has also been the destination for a different kind of pilgrimage – mountaineering and adventure travel, though to this day the mountain has yet to be successfully climbed. In villages such as Yubeng at the base of Kawagebo on the Mekong side of the range, I listened many stories about the history of mountaineering in the area. Between 1987 and 2000, numerous mountaineering teams set up base camps in the grazing camps to the west of Yubeng, which sit just below the lower ice fields of the mountain range. These climbers came from the U.S., Japan, and China; the Tibetan Mountaineering Association has also organized several assaults of the mountain from the Salween side of the range. In almost every case, according to those I have interviewed, villagers were never informed or consulted about the expeditions, until an advance team arrived to hire porters, cooks, and other support staff. Most people in Yubeng and throughout Deqin county remember vividly the nationally publicized mountaineering disaster of January 3, 1991, when seventeen Chinese and Japanese climbers were killed by an avalanche at Camp 3 at 5100 meters during the morning of their final assault for the summit, an event that was broadcast live by the Chinese Internet portal Sohu.[17] A young man in Yubeng, whose uncle worked as a porter and communications liaison for the climbing team, told me the following story:

> On January 2 the advanced team reported to the base camp that weather conditions were good for a final assault of the summit, which would begin at 2 am the next morning. This message was then relayed to officials in the Deqin county seat, and word quickly spread throughout the town that Kawagebo was about to be conquered. Within hours, hundreds of Tibetans from the town and the surrounding villages walked out to the Felaisi temple, where one can look out across the Lancang (Mekong) River valley to glaciers and peak of Kawagebo. The women especially were extremely upset at the mountain, began to curse it, and raise their skirts, a form of insult. They were yelling at the mountain god, demanding to know why it was succumbing to this mountaineering team. The next morning all radio contact was lost with the advance team and within hours it became clear that they had been wiped out by an avalanche, which was heard and witnessed by many people in the herding camps in the valleys below. The villagers returned to the Feilaisi overlook, asking the mountain deity for its forgiveness for their insulting actions the day before, crying hysterically, but also praising the mountain for defeating the climbing team's final assault.

I asked my friend if those who made their way to Feilaisi during those two fateful days were sorry about the deaths of the Japanese and Chinese climbers. "Of course," he said, "everyone felt bad about the deaths, but many

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[16] Ward's travelogue was first published in 1923 and then reissued in 1986 as part of the London-based Cadogan Book's Plant Hunter series. The subtitle of the original read: "A Description of the Little-known Land Where Asia's Mightiest Rivers Gallop in Harness Through the Narrow Gateway of Tibet, Its Peoples' Fauna, and Flora."

[17] Consult the "Report on the Climbing of the Meili Snow Mountain in the New Millennium on the Sohu website, www.sohu.com.

were more concerned that the corpses would never be recovered and just how these restless spirits could be tamed. A series of rituals were thus performed for the dead in the upper reaches of Yubeng."

Since this tragic event, Tibetan villages in the vicinity of the mountain have voiced their opposition to further expeditions, a form of popular grievance that did not escape the TNC staff who opened an office in the town of Deqin in the spring of 2000 to begin to begin the process of site conservation planning for what came to be known as the Meili Action Site. I first began to interview TNC staff in the summer of 2000 and was invited to return to Deqin in October of 2000, to attend a workshop convened by The Nature Conservancy and hosted by the Deqin county government. From the perspective of TNC interests in the area, the ostensibly aim of the workshop was to begin the process of popularizing TNC's conservation strategies, to discuss how to develop a comprehensive management plan that would preserve the natural and cultural resources of the area, as well as promote sustainable social and economic development, i.e. green tourism; local officials in Deqin also wanted to solicit TNC support to deal with Chinese national and international attempts to climb the peaks on the Meili Snow Mountain range. As the TNC report on the workshop states, "the ultimate goal of the partnership [between TNC and the Deqin county government] is to make Meilixueshan one of the top conservation areas in the world, combining compatible tourism and other economic development with conservation of the extraordinary scenic beauty, the vibrant Tibetan culture, and the rich biodiversity." Nearly 80 people attended the four-day workshop, including village, county, provincial and state government representatives, as well as Chinese national experts (from Kunming and Beijing, mainly) on tourist development, conservation financing, and cultural preservation. The workshop was extensively covered both by the Chinese and international media, including representations from newspapers and broadcast television in Kunming, the People's Daily, the Beijing-based English language China Daily, and National Public Radio from Washington DC.

The workshop included visits to the Tibetan temple known as Feilai si, which was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and has been rebuilt and refurbished in the last ten years, and to the base of the astonishing Mingyong glacier, which drops four miles off the east face of Kawagebo and which has become the central focus of tourist development in the region. The workshop was organized around "break-out" or small-group work sessions, which discussed issues such as policy and public participation, biodiversity and nature reserve management, green tourism, and cultural preservation. In addition, there was public lectures presented by John Sacklin, chief of planning at Yellowstone National Park; Uttara Sarkar Crees, who has worked for the World Wildlife Fund in Pingwu County, Sichuan and who now runs the Gyalthang Travel Service out of the town of Zhongdian. There were also presentations from Yu Xiangqian, the deputy director of the Deqin County Tourism Bureau; Wu Jiyou from the Yunnan Environmental Protection Agency; Chen Shuwang of the Forest Ecology Section of the Yunnan Institute of Forest Planning and Inventory; and Fei Xuan, and Kunming-based ecological entrepreneur who is the president of a quasi-private, quasi-government corporation called the Yunnan Investment and Development Company. While an analysis of the varying and often contradictory observations and recommendations of these various Chinese and

international experts on conservation and development is beyond the scope of the present paper, I do want to discuss some of the discussions and debates that emerged during the Cultural Preservation break-out group, in which I participated.

The Cultural Preservation group was facilitated by Yang Fuquan of the Folklore Department of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, who was once a member of the TNC staff in Kunming before he returned to the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences to pursue his own research. It was also attended by Liang Congjie, the head of the Beijing-based Friends of Nature, and Wang Xiaosong, one of the most respected scholars of Tibetan Buddhism in northwest Yunnan. The group was also comprised of two "living buddhas" who live in the vicinity of Meili Snow Mountain, as well as representatives of six different Deqin county government agencies; all of them actively participated in the discussion. Much of the discussion was focused on the history of Tibetan, Chinese, and international mountaineering in the region and what should be done to halt current attempts by different groups both in China and beyond to obtain permits to climb the mountain. The reincarnate lamas explained in some detail the cosmology of local Tibetan beliefs about the mountain landscape, and why many people in the villages are opposed to anyone venturing above certain altitudes, and particularly on glaciers. This has to do with the ways in which Tibetan villagers divide local spaces into internal and external dimensions of their world, the internal belonging to the world of the household, the village and the surrounding arable land, and external belonging to the mountain and forest land outside of village space. He explained that the boundaries between these worlds are marked by mani stone piles and incense burning ovens, and that many of these transition points are called Ri Vgag, meaning "the door of the mountain." This external world, located in the forests and mountain pastures in the high country around the village, is controlled by a group of local mountain deities, all of which center around Kawagebo. The main reason that mountaineering had to be stopped, it was argued, is that this form of activity disrupts the power of the deities and creates an imbalance between the internal and external worlds, an imbalance that brings illness and misfortune to the communities living in the vicinity of the mountain range.

When the various break out groups returned to the larger workshop, the Cultural Preservation group made a recommendation to the larger workshop that a letter of protest be submitted to Vice Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council. It was decided that Liang Congjie, who has deep historical connections with government officials in the capital, would personally preset this letter to the vice-premier. The aim of the letter, signed by all participants attending the workshop, was to get the State Council in Beijing to issue new regulations banning all future mountaineering on Meili Snow Mountain. A Tibetan TNC staff member eventually translated the letter from Chinese into English. Addressed to the respected Vice-Premier, it reads as follows:

> We are conservationists, scientists, and scholars attending the "International Workshop for Meili Snow Mountain Conservation and Development, which was held in Deqin County of Yunnan Province from October 11-14, 2000. This workshop was held under the auspices of the "Northwest Yunnan Conservation and Development Action Plan Project (NYCDP), which is being carried out by the Yunnan Provincial

government with the advice and assistance of The Nature Conservancy. Due to its unique diversified cultures with Tibetan culture as the core, intact ecosystem and rich biodiversity, Meili Snow Mountain is an area of great significance to the Chinese people and to the world. Meili Snow Mountain is in an area that the Chinese government is nominating as a World Heritage Site. Many domestic and international scientists and scholars have recognized Meili as unique for its cultural, natural, and scenic heritage. Therefore, the Meili area has been selected as one of the priority areas for the NYCDP and a comprehensive management plan, which is aimed at preserving the natural and cultural resources as well as promoting sustainable social and economic development of this area, is being carried out.

At the workshop, all participants expressed the opinion that Meili Snow Mountain should be protected. Mountaineering became a heated topic concerned to all participants. Meili Snow Mountain is a famous sacred mountain in all Tibetan areas, and persists as a highly holy position in the Tibetan people's hearts. Consistently we heard about strong appeals from local people, religious circles, local government officials and scholars: they do not want any mountaineering, either domestic or overseas, to climb to the top of the most sacred mountain in their hearts. We also heard about a dozen of climbing attempts organized by both domestic and overseas organizations since 1987 that have not only greatly hurt the Tibetan people's hearts and sentiments, but also brought about negative impact to the social stability and implementation of the national ethnic regulations and laws in this Tibetan area. In early 1997 the Office of the State Council wrote clearly in a reply to the petition by Professor Liang Congjie, a member of the CPPCC, to the General Secretary of the State Council Mr. Luo Gan concerning stopping mountaineering on the Meili Snow Mountain so that in the future all of these kinds of activities should first listen to the opinion of all aspects and respect the decision by the local government. In late 1999 the Deqin County government submitted to the Yunnan Provincial government a report requesting to stop mountaineering attempts on the Meili Snow Mountain.

We, the undersigned, hereby ask you to consider the Meili Snow Mountain mountaineering issue; we hope you demand relevant departments to abide by the previous wide decisions made by the State Council, and to ban mountaineering on Meili Snow Mountain as soon as possible.

There is much that can be said about this attempt to petition the State Council to ban mountaineering on Meili. The letter itself makes references to the history of mountaineering in the region and it opens up a space for the representation of local forms of opposition, which are in this context given voice in the context of an international workshop exploring the interplay and potential contradictions between conservation and development (obviously mountaineering, as it has in other parts of the Himalayas, could be a huge source of revenue for the county government). During the workshop, there were strong

and vociferous arguments from local Tibetans, religious experts, and county officials that mountaineering was an insult to the Tibetan people. The protection of biodiversity in the region, they argued, should not only be about protecting one of the great heritage sites of all of the Tibetan and Chinese people, nor should the terms of protection only be stated in the scientific language of ecology. The protection of nature had to make way for the religious beliefs and practices of the Tibetan people, and this meant, first and foremost, keeping outsiders off of the mountain. [As we drafted a letter to be presented to the central government in Beijing, we learned that a mountaineering team from Lhasa, in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, comprised entirely of Tibetans, had just embarked on an ascent of the northwest face of the mountain. The irony did not go unnoticed to those in attendance.] In the letter, there are also references to minority nationality polices and regulations which, in principle at least, call for the empowerment of local concerns in decisions about the trajectories of development. This seems to suggest that local officials, especially now that the western development project, the infamous *xibu da kaifa*, is stripping away some local decision making power, are attempting to remind the central government of the precarious nature of national and local relations in minority autonomous regions. And finally, and perhaps most strikingly, there is a kind of new community imaginary in the making, one that does not simply unify all Tibetans in the region, but also unifies local officials, religions experts, and villagers with international conservation agendas.

There was also quite a bit of debate about how precisely to name the main peak. Should the petition refer to it as Meili Snow Mountain or as Kawagebo? Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that TNC, in planning the workshop, decided to use the term Meili to publicly name and announcing their new conservation action plan in Deqin County. Several TNC staff eventually admitted to me that this was, on the one hand, a matter of political expediency: some government officials in Deqin thought it was too dangerous to reverse the tide of history and rename the peak using the Tibetan term, for this would amount to a public acknowledgement that the People's Liberation Army had gotten it all wrong in the 1950s (more on this history of naming below). Knowing that their project in Deqin would never get off the ground without the help of the government, TNC clearly acquiesced to the wishes of the government and went with the name Meili. On the other hand, it was explained to me that the decision was also driven by the interests of advertising: the name Meili Snow Mountain, or *meili xueshan*, has become such a fixture in the popular imagination of Chinese and international tourists, that they thought it was too confusing to use the Tibetan way of naming the peak.

This decision to go with the name Meili had unexpected repercussions. Many Tibetan and Chinese scholars, with long histories of research in Deqin County with Tibetan peoples, and who had worked with TNC in the early phases of the project, refused to attend the workshop. One scholar, Professor Guo Jing with the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, insisted that he boycotted the TNC workshop because they had failed to acknowledge the "intellectual property rights" of the local people and had succumbed to the wishes of some local government officials who were merely trying to protect their relations with higher-level officials in Diqing Prefecture. By refusing to participate in the workshop, and by essentially cutting off his collaborative relationship with TNC,

Guo Jing publicly contested TNC's decision to use the term Meilixueshan (or Meili snow mountain) to name the 6740-meter glaciated peak. He did this as well, he argued to me, because TNC was simply replicating the new tourist imaginary of northwest Yunnan as a rediscovered Shangri-la, in which the Chinese language was being used to replace Tibetan linguistic modes of naming of the landscapes in which they live. Indeed, in tourist brochures and on adventure travel web sites, the peak is almost always referred to as the Meili Snow Mountain. He explains the controversy as follows:

> Tibetans living in the villagers at the base of the peak call it Khabadkarpo or, as it sometimes appears in English-language texts, Kawagebo. Kawagebo itself is a Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan *Kha ba dkar po,* meaning white snow mountains. In the Tibetan language, Kawagebo is also called *Gnas chen kha ba dkar po* and *Rong btsan kha ba dkar po*. The addition of the *Gnas chen* and *Rong btsan* is meant to signify the divine nature of the mountain. According to local understandings, Kawagebo is the name of the highest peak, but it is also the general name for a group of mountain gods led by the god who resides in Kawagebo peak. That is, the name refers at once to a geological phenomenon (the mountain) and the gods residing in the 13 peaks along the mountain range.
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> In maps made before the 1950s by European and American botanists and explorers, Kawagebo was called Bailang Xueshan, Baixue shenshan, Baishanniang, Xueshantaizi and Taizixueshan, all of which were rough translations of different local Tibetan names for the range. The contested history of how Kawagebo came to be referred to as "Meilixueshan" can be traced back to the 1950s. "Meili" is a Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan word " *Sman ri*" (meaning " the mountain with medicinal materials"), which used to refer to a very short section of mountains (about 10 kilometers) from Nuwa to Liutongjiang villages in Fuoshan Township. At the foot of the *Sman ri*, there is a village on the Mekong River called *Sman ri shod* (Meilishui), meaning simply "at the foot of the mountains with medicinal materials." Starting out from *Sman ri shod* and climbing over the Shuola pass, one enters Zuogong County in the Tibet Autonomous Region. In the 1950s when the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet via this pass, they named the pass and the entire mountain range upon which it is located as Meili. In 1957, when the Yunnan Department of Transportation was building the highway that today connects Deqin County with Yanjing County in the Tibet Autonomous Region, they used the original PLA maps. They too marked all the mountain ranges to the west of Mekong River within Deqin County as "Meilixueshan." This included the 6,740-meter Kawagebo peak.
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> Since the unsuccessful summit attempt made by the Sino-Japanese Joint Climbing Team in 1991, the word "Meilixueshan" has become the standard way to name Kawagebo peak and the ridgeline that separates Yunnan from Tibet. In fact, the Joint Climbing Team used the road building maps from 1957, when Kawagebo peak was mistakenly marked as "Meilixueshan." It was for this reason that the climbing team came to be known as the "Japanese-Chinese Meilixueshan Joint Climbing Team for Scientific Research." What they called "Meilixueshan" was what the Tibetans called " Kawagebo", the 6,740-meter summit. Due to the wide

> media coverage that followed the failed summit attempt (the progress of the climb was covered daily on a Chinese website run by China's largest Internet portal company Suohu), this nomenclature has come to be widely adopted. The real problem is that it totally denies the intellectual property rights of the Tibetan people (Guo Jing 2000).

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to explore how local systems of naming landscapes and mountain peaks might be included under the category of intellectual property rights, other than to note how a concept borrowed from the arsenal of the global indigenous rights movement is here deployed to critique one aspect of the TNC project in northwest Yunnan. What interests me in the context of the present paper is how Chinese scholars like Guo Jing, who have studied the Tibetan language and worked in these regions for many years, and who are openly identified as believers of Tibetan Buddhism, are working, through both academic and popular channels, to make a space for the revitalization of Tibetan religious practice. What is clear, however, is that in this particular case this is done by a call for the acknowledgement and protection of local systems of naming landscapes, as well as through a critique of an international NGO and its collaborations with the Chinese government.

This particular anti-mountaineering episode reveals something about the emerging complexities involved in collaborative environmental projects which attempt to link the discourses of biodiversity protection with the diverse interests of government bureaucracies (a theme I have only begun to touch upon here), and drawn on the expertise of scholars such as Guo Jing, who bring their own ideological commitments and agendas to their research and to their interactions with international NGOs. In a sense, what we have here is a collision of competing discourses and agendas, what I would call different mobilizations of nature, all of which revolve around a newly emergent discourse of indigenous naturalism: the science of biodiversity conservation represented in the TNC project, the defense of local belief systems by an outside Chinese scholar heavily identified with the rights of local peoples and who also believes that Tibetans, because of their cosmological views of how productive and religious space is divided, possess knowledges which should be studied and embraced in any large-scale development and conservation plan for the region. We also have a government apparatus at the county level that sees TNC as both a source of knowledge and capital for local development initiatives (the largest being biogas converters) but which must also deal with the demands for tourist growth and development, demands that have come not just with the fact that the logging ban has altered the local economy, but also because government officials in Deqin are well aware that the model for development in this area is the bustling town of Lijiang.

In May of 2002, I returned to Yubeng with a Tibetan friend of mine living in the county seat of Deqin. Qisi, as I will call him, works as a tour guide for the Meili Travel Agency and helps run a low-budget lodging establishment called The Trekker's Lodge. Yubeng is one of the village stops on what is known as the internal pilgrimage route, a shorter inner path on the Mekong side of the range that pilgrims walk when they don't have time to commit to the longer "outer" circuit. I had asked him to take me to the site of the 1991 climbing exhibition

base camp. After a six-hour trek through mixed fir and spruce forest, we arrived in a large upper meadow that served as a herder's camp. We set up camp and spent three days exploring the upper reaches of the valley, working our way on to the moraines and lower glaciers, collecting mushrooms, and visiting a secret sacred lake, where pilgrims collect water to take back to the elders in their villages who can no longer make the pilgrimage. In recent years, he told me, herders from Yubeng had found the remains of corpses scattered here and there on the glacial moraines, pieces of bodies, twisted arms and bones, and bits and pieces of climbing gear, a fragment of a rope, a cache of carabineers. Qishi loved this land, and often talked about the historical brutalities of the Chinese regime, his hatred of Han Chinese and especially the new backpacking tourist groups who came from Beijing and Shanghai and refused to hire the guiding services of his local travel agency. I told him exactly what I had told a *Chinese Daily* reported who had interviewed me about what thoughts on tourism and mountaineering during the Meili workshop in the Fall of 2000: it was my sense that, despite the local opposition to mountaineering, which was always presented to me on spiritual or religious grounds, that the massive influx of tourists to this area would ultimately do more harm than an occasional mountaineering exhibition. He laughed and told me a story about how the previous year he had led three mountaineers from Italy who wanted to climb Kawagebo into the upper meadows of Yubeng. One evening, as they were waiting for the weather to clear, a contingent of villagers from Yubeng came to their camp to inform Qishi that his Italian friends would not be able to go any further – travel on the upper glaciers was forbidden by village mandate. Qishi and his friends reluctantly turned back. He said to me: imagine the money that could be made if these villagers weren't so superstitious!

Conclusion

I want to conclude with a story about an environmental activist I came to know in the course of my fieldwork in Deqin, a young man who has also worked intermittently with TNC over the last couple of years. In 1995, Xi Zhinong was a 33-year-old photographer working for the Yunnan Forestry Department. Xi Zhinong grew up in Kunming, and he had spent much of his youth traveling to the ethnic minority mountainous regions of Yunnan Province. The forestry department assigned him to spend three years photographing the snub-nosed monkey in the Baima Snow Mountain Nature Reserve, which is just to the southeast of the Meili range, forming the boundary between the Mekong and Yangtze River watersheds. Toward the end of his filming project in 1995, he discovered that the Deqin county government had sold loggers the right to clear-cut a 100-square kilometer swath of old-growth forest at the southern boundary of the nature reserve. When he learned of this logging scheme, Xi implored the county governor to stop it, arguing that it would encroach upon the natural habitat of some 200 monkeys, which represented about one-fifth of the remaining population of 1000 (US Embassy 1996). Recall that this was four years before the logging ban of 1999. In 1995, 90% of Deqin County's revenues came from the timber industry. At the time Deqin was one of the poorest counties in China, with an annual per capita income of 400 RMB, some 80 RMB below the Chinese official poverty level of 480 RMB; the county had not been able to meet its payroll obligations for several months. The governor told him that the logging could only be stopped if he could raise about 8 million *renminbi*, about US $1 million.

Xi Zhinong then approached the Vice-Premier of Yunnan's Forestry department, who replied that a provincial level department could not interfere in a county's development schemes. He then traveled to Beijing and approached a man named Song Jian, the minister for Science and Technology in China. He also began to work the media and to engage in educational outreach on college campuses in Beijing. On December 20, 1995, 200 students at the Beijing Forestry College organized a candlelight vigil for the monkeys, an event that was subsequently broadcast on national television. Song Jian then ordered the Ministry of Forestry in Beijing to investigate. By the end of January in 1996, Yunnan government officials ordered Deqin County to stop the logging on the southern boundary of the Baima Snow Mountain nature reserve.

In March of 1996, Xi Zhinong returned to the area only to discover that the timber company was still building a logging road into the area. Outraged, Xi Zhinong, with the help of friends and family, and with the support of Liang Congjie's organization Friends of Nature, launched a massive media campaign to expose the Deqin county governor. Part of this exposure included the making of a thirty-minute documentary on the ecology of the snub-nosed monkey, which was repeatedly broadcast on Chinese national television (Xi Zhinong's wife had worked for several years for the English language edition of the China Daily and had numerous contacts in media circles in Beijing). With all of the attention focused on the plight of some 1000 monkeys in the outback of Yunnan Province, the Deqin county government finally acquiesced. The logging plan was abandoned, but not until the provincial government provided Deqin County with compensation for the lost timber revenues in the amount of US $1 million. While Xi Zhinong was championed in the press throughout Hong Kong and East Asia as one of China's newly emergent environmental activists, he also paid a price. He lost his job at the Forestry department, and was essentially asked not to return to Deqin County.[18]

In 1999, activist Xi started his own environmental NGO, called The Green Plateau, or *luse gaoyuan*. He and his wife set up their modest outfit in the town of Zhongdian, where they went to work making ecological videos on the wildlife in northwest Yunnan, and distributing them to primary and secondary schools throughout China. They received money from Friends of Nature, the World Wildlife Fund, and The Nature Conservancy. For those of us who would like to see the Chinese government make a real commitment to protecting the country's biodiversity, Xi Zhinong's story serves as a source of inspiration. Judith Shapiro, in the conclusion of *Mao's War Against Nature*, writes,

> On the biodiversity issue, courageous groups and individuals have acted to publicize the plight of the Tibetan antelope; one such activist was martyred by a poacher's bullet… Similar activism centers around a campaign to save the rare Yunnan snub-nosed monkey. The young leader, a photographer and filmmaker named Xi Zhinong, has become a

[18] Part of this campaign of exposure included the organization of "green camps" to the Baima Nature Reserve in 1996, what the organizers termed a "Long March" to save the snubbed-nose monkey. From June 25 to August 25, 1996, twenty-two college students, master's degree students and doctorate candidates from Beijing, Kunming, and Harbin along with ten media people traveled to the nature reserve under the leadership of the environmentalist Tang Xiyang, the former editor of *Daxiran* (Nature) magazine. For of book length discussion of this green camp exhibition, see Chen Xiaohun (1998).

> local environmental hero… He and his wife, Shi Lihong, a former China Daily reporter, have since established the Yunnan Plateau Research Institute [I translate this as Green Plateau], a non-governmental organization devoted to the monkey's cause, and they have moved with their infant child to the region to work with poor villagers and local leaders to enlist them in the monkey's protection, help them find development alternatives, and monitor and publicize the situation… China's youth, particularly those pursuing higher educations, yearn to join the world community, to become global citizens, and to link with their peers overseas (Shapiro 2001: 209-210).

While certainly correct is noting that Xi Zhinong has become a somewhat of a hero in environmental activist circles, Shapiro's description overlooks many of the struggles that Xi and his wife have had to face in trying to set up their NGO in northwest Yunnan, not the least of which is that most local officials purposeful try to avoid them. As I mentioned above, Deqin county officials refused to allow him to officially participate in the Meili Conservation and Development workshop; by 2002, their NGO, the luse gaoyuan, had eventually failed, in part because it was under-funded, in part because they could not win the support of local government officials. In drawing attention to the work of this NGO at the local level, Shapiro also overlooks how this work has been entirely dependent on their use of quite non-local networks of power and influence that aren't accessible to most people who live in places such as Deqin. As with The Nature Conservancy and other international environmental groups working presently in China, Xi Zhinong has drawn on a wide range of groups and resources around China, including the media, to publicize his agenda. He has been able to effectively built strong alliances with national, regional, and global environmental groups, from Beijing to Hong Kong to Geneva. And he has drawn increased attention to the complex and destructive history of logging and timber exploration in southwest China. In the process, he has been embraced by environmental activists around the world, someone who has placed himself "in the forefront of the global battle to protect the natural world" (Hutchinson 2002:1). In October 2002, he was the first wildlife photographer from China to win Britain's Gerald Durrell award for Endangered Wildlife (for his documentary *Mystery of the Snub-nosed Monkey*), perhaps the most authoritative international documentary competition in the wildlife field.

In thinking about this and similar forms of environmental activism, it is necessary to examine the relationship between metropolitan desires to protect forests, nature reserves, and endangered species and how local communities think about China's current development agendas. Responding to the ideology of wilderness management in the West, Ramachandra Guha has used the term the "ecology of the affluent" to refer to how metropolitan elites call for the protection of pristine nature because it provides both a reservoir of biological diversity and an enormous aesthetic appeal (Guha 1997). In embracing wilderness and championing the rights of Mother Nature, the metropolitan elite, Guha argues, often exhibits little concern for the needs of local peoples who struggle daily with the inequalities of development. Guha thus contrasts the "ecology of the affluent" with what he calls the "environmentalism of the poor." Guha uses this latter term to refer to localized, grass root social movements that

call for the preserving of certain kinds of nature, and to ask pointed questions about how and why certain kinds of environments are being saved.

Guha reminds us that the western wilderness crusade has its vanguard representatives in the Third World. From Guha's perspective, these would perhaps be people like Xi Zhinong, many of the Chinese and Tibetan staff at The Nature Conservancy, who are all committed to the idea to set aside vast areas as national parks and biodiversity sanctuaries. Where I differ from Guha is that I am not sure that the distinction between First World metropolitans and the Third World poor is entirely applicable to this particular context in China. The Yunnan Great Rivers Project, for example, complicates this way of mapping global power differentials because there are two many diverse actors pursing a range of agendas informed by different histories, conceptions of nature, and ideologies of development. Guha's image of the geography of power is too modernist, too tied to static conceptions of the sites of domination and resistance.[19] In contrast, I'd like to suggest that what we are seeing in the Yunnan Great Rivers project is the emergence of new forms of trans-local (across different localities in northwest Yunnan), trans-regional (across different parts of China and East and southeast Asia), and transnational activism and knowledge production (across the Pacific). We may also be seeing the making a new form of post-socialist environmental governmentality, in which the preservation of nature is increasingly linked to the production of knowledge about how ethnic minority populations have historically controlled and managed local resources and imagined the landscapes in which they live and work, what I have called a form of indigenous naturalism.

This gesture I am making toward a new deterritorialized geography of power relations stems in large part from my interest in making sense of the role that national and international non-government environmental organizations are playing in conservation and development debates in contemporary China. It also seems to be consistent with recent writings on globalization. Arjun Appadurai, for example, has used the term "grassroots globalization" to describe forms of organizing that cut across national borders and boundaries and which constitute a "new architecture of global governance." Consistent with all of his writings on transnationalism, he asserts that the key feature of this new architecture is the way in which the nation-state has been eroded as the fundamental site for the cultural expression of political and economic sovereignty. Appadurai also argues that grassroots activists who speak against histories of environmental degradation, and who aim to give voice to the poor, the vulnerable, and the dispossessed often lack the means to produce a systematic grasp of the complexities of globalization. Not unlike other scholars such as Arturo Escobar, David Harvey, and Anna Tsing, he calls on scholars in

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[19] Tania Murray Li, who has written about the politics of conservation, relocation, and development in Sulawesi's upland frontier, provides an alternative model. Li argues that the hill folk she studied construct their identities and communities in and through the configurations of authority that emanate from the coastal elites. Upland peoples do not simply or mechanically incorporate development agendas into their understandings of their lives and situations, but actively engage them, make use of them, give them new meanings. She writes, "The fields of knowledge and power set up by divergent development agendas coexist uneasily, their contradictions unresolved. Thus, even when planning appears to demand legibility, there is no singular and coherent government vision determining and ordering the relevant information but rather multiple, mediated visions build up over time into different configurations" (Li 2001:62).

the social sciences and the humanities to envision and practice new forms of collaboration, which he believes will create new forms of dialogue between academics, public intellectuals, activists, and policy makers. Where I would differ from Appadurai is that the new forms of collaboration that are taking place in northwest Yunnan in no way preclude the agency of the state.[20] In fact, I would assert that one of the defining features of environmental politics in northwest Yunnan is that the state remains a key actor, viewed both as an outside force against which people articulate their own agendas (as in Guo Jing's refusal to collaborate with TNC because of their use of a PLA mapping and naming system or in Xi Zhinong's use of a national media campaign to expose the secret dealings of a county official), but also in terms of how the state itself is involved in actively popularizing new notions of sustainable develop and new ideologies of nature.

If there are new natures in the making in northwest Yunnan, then they are being created somewhere in the hybrid space between the state's mobilization of national and international biodiversity organizations and calls to make a space for the religious cosmologies of "local peoples" (though it escapes me how Tibetans, either historically or in the contemporary period, could ever be considered "local.") These new natures are not outside of new configurations of environmental governance, any more than they are remote to or removed from all of the anxieties about market reforms, WTO hegemonies, poverty, environmental destruction, and local representation that are found in other regions of China today. Guo Jing, as with many others critical of the new international environmental presence and their courtship with the Chinese state, would argue that it is time for China to move beyond the view that nature is separate from people, an object to be exploited, transformed, and used indefinitely for human betterment. Guo Jing is committed to stopping mountaineering, but the only way he can imagine this is by arguing that religious and ecological beliefs of local peoples have a role to play in development projects, or by turning to popularize international notions of intellectual property rights. One danger here is that the Tibetan other is too

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[20] Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, in their recently published and much discussed book *Empire*, offer a more pessimistic view of whether NGOs and other transnational advocacy organizations can resolve the social and economic inequalities that characterize the world of global capital (Hardt and Negri 2000). In their view, NGOs, despite their commitment to community empower projects and social and economic justice movements spread new forms of civilizing work, in which human needs and rights are taken as universals. Because NGOs often speak against the abuses of governments and the inequalities of capital, and because they work between and beyond local, national, and global spaces, they reproduce what Hardt and Negri argue is a new kind of global sovereignty, in which the peaceful, non-violent regulation of social life, in all of its entirety, is done not by governments, states, or capital, but by actors, agents, and institutions spread out across the globe and each pursuing their own desires to speak, in highly moralizing terms, for the dispossessed, the marginal, the degraded and the ruined.

Some of the processes of conservation and development I have discussed in this paper seem to be consistent with Hardt and Negri's notion of the emergence of a new kind of imperial biopower, one which knows no singular center of power and yet which brings everyone within its fold. Yet, as with my critique of Appadurai, I think their dismissal of the state as a key player in the global order of science and capital is simply too hasty, at least in the context of Yunnan, to say nothing of the central government's current western development plan. For a discussion of NGOs in China, and especially China-based GONGOs, or governmental, non-government organizations, see Raab (1996).

easily homogenized as a unified religious subject; landscapes cosmologies are too uncritically believed to ensure a more effective stewardship of the land, and this is simply too much evidence from across northwest Yunnan and throughout China that Tibetan peoples have long been involved in the exploitation of forests and grasslands, in ways that could hardly be imagined as "sustainable."[21]

We cannot romanticize these new forms of ecological activism, nor can we champion TNC and other international environmental groups as the future of China. As I have suggested, as with so many environmental groups and so-called non-governmental agencies in China, they are too closely tied to state interests and desires, and for this reason alone they recognize the precarious nature of their continued existence as key environmental actors in China. Additionally, new forms of development will come to northwest Yunnan despite their intentions, especially as new roads are built and villages are turned into model tourist destinations. People will increasingly come from afar to observe and visit Tibetan villages, and county governments and tourism bureaus will no doubt popularize the idea that the local peoples have long lived in harmony with nature. The making of Shangri-la will continue to be informed by the kinds of fantasies that were first created by the likes of Hilton and those explorers who ventured through these regions in the nineteen and early twentieth centuries and who wrote about the stunning landscapes, the rivers, valleys, flora and fauna of northwest Yunnan. This new Shangri-la also will be formed in large part by the desires, activities, and capital that are coming with all of the new global environmental attention that has come to the region in the last few years. In this complex border zone, ethnic minorities will be linked to the preservation of natural landscapes, and they will be championed as the gatekeepers for China's vast and stupendous biological resources. As we attempt to follow and understand the politics of conservation in these border zones, we will have to constantly ask ourselves: just whose nature is this? Whose interests does it serve? And to what ends?

[21] Provide citations, Winkler, Huber, etc.

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