

Riding the Tourism Train?

Navigating Intellectual Property, Heritage and Community-Based Approaches to Cultural Tourism

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"Jump on board the Spirit Catcher Train ride for a 13-minute journey into the forest of Stanley Park and the Aboriginal history and culture of British Columbia." Thus opens an invitation to visit Klahowya Village, a "traditional First Nations Village" and new tourist attraction in the heart of Vancouver. In offering cultural activity areas, live cultural performances and re-created traditional dwellings, Klahowya Village is reminiscent of ethnic theme parks that operate in many parts of the world, ostensibly living museums that combine an educational mission with a profit motive. In effect such parks function to catalogue and domesticate cultural diversity within political borders and further the aims of nation-building projects for both citizens and foreign visitors. As a seemingly prototypical example of cultural heritage tourism development, the "Village" triggers concerns about cultural appropriation through market capitalism and stated identity projects.

However, Klahowya Village is different. It is operated by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC), which partners with government agencies and corporate sponsors, but is run by representatives from Canadian First Nations. According to its website (www.aboriginalbc.com), the AtBC is "a non-profit, membership-based organization that is committed to growing and promoting a sustainable, culturally rich Aboriginal tourism industry" for the benefit of First Nations communities. But even with the express promotion of indigenous participation and interests in this tourism venture, a series of questions remain. Just whose village is it? Which groups' traditions are represented and from what era? How were they selected and by whom? How do tourists' expectations help shape what is presented? And who exactly is benefiting and how?

Cultural Heritage Tourism

"Aboriginal" tourism has been on the rise across Canada for at least a

decade, and it is not alone. Tourism, and especially cultural and heritage tourism, is increasingly seen by indigenous groups worldwide as a viable opportunity for economic development, and in many cases one of few options available. At the same time, communities are not always willing participants in cultural tourism, and serious problems arise when local heritage values and tourist expectations collide. When in conflict, protecting cultural values sometimes outweighs the pursuit of economic benefits, especially where communities do not distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage and where inap-

propriate or disrespectful behavior can cause real harm. For example, in rock art-rich Kimberly region of northern Australia, the well-known *wanjina* pictographs are considered animate by contemporary Wanjina-Wunggurr people; the paintings embody creator beings who formed the land, laws and customs of these people. These images continue to be freshened up (repainted) to keep the world right. As tourism has soared, the community has attempted to prohibit unauthorized visits, viewing and reproduction of the sacred sites and images to avoid offending the *wanjina*, according to Christoph Graber (*Australian Indigenous Law Review* 13[2]). Here, the well-being of the world is not measured by simple economic gain through tourist dollars; a better balance is actively being sought.

The intersection of intellectual property and cultural tourism is a critical area for understanding the ways in which the commodification of heritage is reshaping the relationships between culture, communities and consumers.

heries, to access to archaeological and ethnographic research results, to the re-creation of traditional activities and replicated sites (eg, Klahowya). The global rise of cultural tourism poses special issues for intellectual property and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, whether as products of archaeological research or aspects of heritage communities identify as having ongoing significance. Nearly everywhere, tourism makes the potential commodity value of cultural heritage more apparent and more accessible. Tourism also increases the global circulation of words, images and ideas associated with cultural

Intellectual Property

One vital dimension is the evolving realm of intellectual property, specifically the intangible elements of cultural heritage. Intellectual property issues associated with cultural tourism range from marketing information derived from oral histo-

meaningful, equitable and satisfying ventures.

IPinCH and Community-Based Research

Community-based research is a major component of an international, multi-sectoral project that we are both part of. The Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project is a seven-year, international, 50-plus member collaborative project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (see Nicholas et al, *AN* 51[3]: 11–12).

Cultural tourism is one of eight major research themes. IPinCH seeks to expand resources for those developing sustainable, community-based tourism. This includes identifying models for successful and equal tourism partnerships between indigenous communities and others; finding ways to empower communities to participate in or create their own programs; and exploring how to mitigate visitor impact on important heritage sites and practices.

A vital step in developing community-based cultural tourism is knowing how cultural heritage is conceptualized by those who share it, which aids in developing a consensus as to what to share with others and how best to do so. A case in point is an IPinCH-funded initiative in Nunavik, northern Quebec, Canada, developed by Daniel Gendron, Taqralik Partridge and Nancy Palliser of the Avataq Cultural Institute. The study is organized around the community-voiced question, "How can Inuit language and culture be preserved in the context of cultural tourism?" They note that "The Nunavimmiut understand the need to strengthen their identity and develop a strong economic basis for the region. While these two objectives can go well together, there is a danger that the short-term effects of increased economic benefits will have a negative impact on the cultural identity. 'Cultural tourism' may become one of these traps."

To avoid such a potential trap, the Avataq study focuses on information gathering, specifically relating to the forces driving development of tourism in the North and the interests (and concerns) the Nunavimmiut

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Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom

Ethnic Tourism and Poverty Alleviation in Contemporary China

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China's population of 1.3 billion includes 56 official nationalities or *minzu* of which 110 million people, nearly 10%, are "minority" (ie, non-Han) nationalities or ethnic groups, mostly found in Southern and Western provinces. These *minzu* have inhabited Han Chinese consciousness for centuries. The attraction of *minzu* for domestic Han tourists is complex: fascination with difference and ambivalent nostalgia (and *schadenfreude*) for "the simpler life" (which is closely tied to poverty). In relation to the self-confident Han, minorities are feminized (Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules*, 2000; Sandra Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, 2007), with the significant exceptions of Tibetans and Uyghur who self-consciously perform more "masculine" roles (Zhang Jinfu, "Touristic Encounter, Identity Recognition and Presentation," *London Journal of Tourism* 2[1]: 12–19).

Under Mao Zedong, development was promoted through education and technical advancements, and "backward customs" such as polygamy, foot-binding and religion were banned. In 1956–57 Mao promoted the "Hundred Flowers Movement" (often translated "thousand flowers") to encourage innovations and popular critiques, followed by the top-down Great Leap Forward and the violent Cultural Revolution. After 1978, closing the gap between *minzu* and Han focused on poverty alleviation and selective assimilation through education and wage labor. Prime

has been the promotion of domestic tourism to rural areas where ethnic difference is maintained through traditional performances, often reviving formerly banned cultural forms.

The commoditization of *minzu* culture poses challenges to Western social sciences. One path, stressed by NGOs and foreign advisors, emphasizes the preservation of authentic material and

choreographed ethnic performances in "fake/folk villages" (Yunnan) and theme parks (Shenzhen) in which the selected ethnic performers feel professional pride (Jing Li, "Tourism Enterprise, the State and the Construction of Multiple Dai Cultures in Contemporary Xishuang Banna," *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 9[4]: 315–29; Tamar Gordon, *Global Villages*, 2005 [video]). The minority culture provides the background for a stereotyped theme, and well-paid *minzu* perform in colorful extravaganzas organized by wealthy Han companies. In this staged authenticity, the staging is more important than the authenticity.

A third path, heralded as a success story, is the training of Yao farm families in Guanxi to run small hotels, shops and holiday villages. This path, in contrast, is a greater economic success but does not depend on or promote ethnic difference; indeed it is socio-economic assimilation, requiring a command of Mandarin, knowledge of tourist tastes and an ability to operate a small business enterprise. Within the decentralized policy of development, experimentation is encouraged and successes rewarded in different ways as forms of cultural capitalism.



October 2004. At the entrance to Upper Langde village in the Bala River Development Project, young Miao women in "traditional" costume greet an official tourist party with smiles and offerings of rice wine while posing for tourists' cameras and local television news crews. Photo courtesy Nelson Graburn

performative culture (Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 1989), yet neither the Chinese tourists nor the ethnic performers necessarily feel such a need (Jenny Chio, "The Internal Expansion of China," in *Asia on Tour*, 2009). Typically, traditionally dressed young women perform and demonstrate crafts in rural villages staged as meeting grounds. They interact directly with tourists, with men in background roles.

A second path is the hyper-development of

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have regarding it. Gendron and colleagues will accomplish this through interviews and focus groups first in three communities and then with government representatives and tourism developers, followed by a plenary meeting in which representatives of all parties involved can discuss the results. The team will work with community members to produce recommendations concerning Nunavimmiut perspectives on tourism and create a formal proposal. "The ultimate objective," Gendron and colleagues note, "is to make sure that tourism is not devel-

oped independently from the local stakeholders and that it corresponds to what the Inuit want to share about their lives and their land."

As more communities seek to enter or simply better manage the cultural tourism market—an arena already dominated by corporate and government interests—control over representation, economic benefits, sustainable resource management and culturally appropriate ways to experience or use heritage have become key areas of concern. Many communities echo the interests and concerns of the Nunavimmiut: a recognition that cultural tourism offers potential benefits that must be balanced with local needs, desires and values. Admittedly, achieving such a balance is chal-

lenging, complicated by the diversity of perspectives held throughout any one community and beyond. We see community-based research, such as initiatives supported by IPinCH and others, offering a means to raise and address the questions prompted by intangible heritage concerns at the outset of tourism development rather than as an afterthought.

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Hollowell (University Press of Florida, 2009).

George Nicholas (Simon Fraser U) is director of the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage Project. His recent publications include Being and Becoming Indigenous Archaeologists and the co-authored set of articles on "Intellectual Property Issues in Heritage Management" in Heritage Management 2(2) and 3(1).

The authors invite readers to send examples of problematic cultural tourism initiatives, as well as where community-based participatory research aids are being utilized, for consideration by the IPinCH team. For information go to www.sfu.ca/ipinch.