

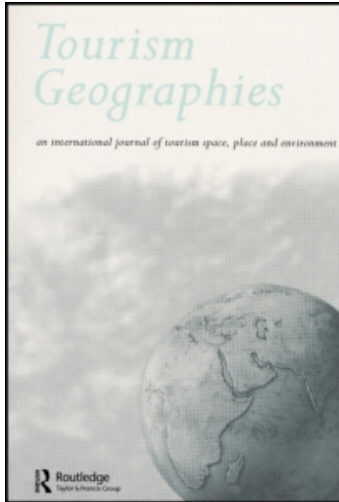
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The Imagination of Place and Tourism Consumption: A Case Study of Lijiang Ancient Town, China

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ABSTRACT *Tourism consumption has been conceptualized either as a free pursuit of pleasure and escape or a highly rationalized activity. Based on questionnaire surveys of 483 tourists and personal interviews of 18 tourists concerning Lijiang Ancient Town, a World Heritage site in China, this article contends that tourism consumption neither draws on freedom of choice nor conforms to the rigidities of predetermined norms. Instead, evidence suggests that tourism consumption dwells in the endless negotiations between tourists' imagination, their economic and cultural capital, and the norms and values embedded in their destinations. Following Ateljevic's work on circuits of tourism, this paper has two objectives. First, it will analyse the touristic imagination of Lijiang Ancient Town and examine how this imagination shapes tourists' practices of consumption. Secondly, the paper will explore the multi-sensory practices of consumption and how these practices transform Lijiang's heritage landscapes. The paper argues that imagination and consumption together help to build a socio-spatial connection between destinations and the wider consumer society, which enables tourists to become an active group to shape the production and representation of tourism landscapes.*

KEY WORDS: Imagination, consumption, socio-spatial connections, landscape, Lijiang

Résumé: Imaginaire/imagination, lieu et consommation touristique: l'ancienne ville de Lijiang

On a conçu la consommation du tourisme soit comme une libre poursuite de plaisir et d'évasion, soit comme une activité hautement rationnelle. Sur la base de 483 questionnaires remplis par des touristes et de 18 interviews concernant la vieille ville de Lijiang, un site du patrimoine mondial en Chine, on a déterminé que la consommation du tourisme n'est ni basée sur une liberté de choix ni ne se conforme à des normes préétablies et rigides. Les résultats suggèrent, en fait, que cette consommation se débat dans des négociations sans fin entre l'imagination des touristes, leur capital économique et culturel et les normes et valeurs qui existent dans leur destination. Cet article a deux objectifs, sur la base des travaux d'Ateljevic sur les circuits du tourisme. Il analyse d'abord l'imaginaire touristique de la vieille ville de Lijiang et examine comment cet imaginaire influence les pratiques consommatoires des touristes. Ensuite, l'article explore les pratiques multi-sensorielles de consommation et comment ces pratiques transforment les paysages patrimoniaux de Lijiang. L'article conclut que l'imaginaire/imagination et la consommation participent ensemble à

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la construction d'un lien socio spatial entre les destinations et la société de consommation, ce qui permet aux touristes de se transformer en agents de production et de représentation de paysages touristiques.

Mots-clés: Imagination/imaginaire, consommation, liens socio spatiaux, paysage, Lijiang

Zusammenfassung: Die Vorstellung von Ort und Tourismuskonsum: Eine Fallstudie von Lijiang Altstadt, China

Tourismuskonsum ist entweder als ein freies verfolgen von Vergnügen und Flucht oder als hoch rationalisierte Tätigkeit aufgefasst worden. Auf der Grundlage von auf Fragebögen basierenden Befragungen von 483 Touristen sowie persönlichen Interviews von 18 Touristen hinsichtlich Lijiang Altstadt, der Stätte eines Weltkulturerbes in China, behauptet dieser Artikel, dass Tourismuskonsum weder auf freier Wahl basiert noch den Starrheiten von vorgegebenen Normen unterliegt. Stattdessen gibt es Hinweise, die darauf hindeuten, dass sich Tourismuskonsum in endlosen Verhandlungen zwischen den Vorstellungen der Touristen, ihrem wirtschaftlichen und kulturellem Kapital sowie den Normen und Werten, eingebettet in ihren Zielgebieten, bewegt. Der Arbeit Ateljevic über Kreisläufe im Tourismus folgend, verfolgt diese Studie zwei Ziele. Zunächst wird es die touristische Imagination der Lijiang Altstadt analysieren, und untersuchen, wie diese Imagination touristische Praktiken des Konsums beeinflusst. Des Weiteren will diese Studie die multisensorischen Praktiken des Konsums erforschen, und wie diese Praktiken Lijiangs Kulturerbe Landschaften verwandelt. Die Studie argumentiert, dass Vorstellung und Konsum zusammen helfen, eine sozialräumliche Verbindung zwischen Destinationen und der weiteren Konsumgesellschaft zu schaffen, welches Touristen befähigt, eine aktive Gruppe zu werden, die bei der Gestaltung von Produktion und der Darstellung von touristischen Landschaften mitwirkt.

Stichwörter: Vorstellung, Konsum, sozialräumliche Verbindungen, Landschaft, Lijiang

Introduction

The study of consumption of goods and services has proliferated (Miller 1995; Gottdiener 2000; Jackson 2004; Mansvelt 2009). Consumption refers not only to the purchase and use of commodities and services, but also to a cultural process whereby individuals make meaning and judgement through which they consume (Jackson *et al.* 2007). The relation between meaning and consumption is particularly exemplified in the arena of heritage tourism. Since the 1970s, an increasing number of tourists has shifted their interest from these tourists traditional tourism products such as sea and sun to heritage and cultural sites. Through heritage tourism, 'increasingly attempt to construct their identities by articulating consumption preferences and lifestyle practices that signal their [own] taste and position in society' (Ateljevic and Doorne 2003: 125). These tourists use their economic and cultural power to decode and communicate heritage messages by 'constructing their own sense of historic places to create their individual journeys of self-discovery' (Nuryanti 1996: 250–1). This paper furthers an understanding of tourism consumption through a focus on the imagination of heritage landscape and tourists' multi-sensory practices of consumption. Its main aim is to examine how tourists imagine and consume heritage landscape in the case of Lijiang Ancient Town, a World Heritage site in Yunnan Province, in southwest

China. I draw upon a theoretical framework based in studies of tourism consumption, especially in Ateljevic's (2000) work on circuits of tourism.

Generally, two major debates point to the gist of tourism consumption. The first debate could be labelled as 'freedom of choice'. Tourists consume relaxation by choosing to gaze upon a different culture (Urry 2002). This pursuit of pleasure helps them to escape from their routine lives (MacCannell 1976) by satiating their desires in surroundings different from the everyday. As a consumption form, tourism is deemed as a high-order consumer good where the extraordinary surroundings help to support the notion that choice is sovereign and the personal stamp is palpable. Put differently, tourists have power to negotiate with other actors in the tourism industry in order to achieve their freedom of choice and fulfill their search for novelty and alternative experiences (see MacCannell 1976; Urry 2002). In the second debate, scholars contend that such pursuits have become highly rationalized and standardized and are no longer exceptional (Oakes and Minca 2004). Ritzer and Liska (1997) describe the McDisneyization of tourism, whereby tourism destinations have become highly efficient locations where tourists' experiences have become highly predictable, calculable and controlled. Similarly, Meethan (2001: 12) argues that the tourist in general is 'not exercising choice or agency', but is 'rather driven by the external stimulus of modernity to respond in causally predetermined ways'. While contributing much to scholarly understanding of tourists, these studies neglect two critical points that are essential for understanding tourism consumption.

First, insufficient attention has been paid to the connection between the representation of tourism landscapes in mass media and the practices of consumption on site. Writing about tourism and new media, Jansson (2007: 5) argues that mass media and tourism promotion material can influence 'perceptions of place, distance, sociality, authenticity, and other pre-understandings that frame tourism'. Ateljevic (2000) points out that tourist imagination about a place is constructed and sustained through mass media which may or may not directly promote tourism destinations. Research has been done on the impacts of media representations on destination image in the cases of Tibet (Mercille 2005) and India (Bandyopadhyay and Morais 2005). Nevertheless, it is still under-investigated how these impacts constitute tourists' imagination of place and then are fed into tourists' consumption in destinations.

The imagination of destination plays an important role in influencing tourists' practices (Hughes 1991). Normally, this imagination takes shape in their own society and comes from mass media, tourism promotion material, word of mouth and so on. After examining touristic imaginations of the Taj, a World Heritage site in India, as Otherness and exoticism, Edensor (1998) contends that these imaginations are largely derived from mass media and travel stories. The habitual schema of imagination has its own power in influencing tourists' practices of consumption which concretize and illuminate imagination in spaces. The spirit of modern consumerism, as Campbell (1987: 205) argues, is characterized by 'a longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination'. Unsurprisingly, the imagination of

some non-Western destinations as traditional and exotic is lived as reality, 'informing the practices of Westerners in the Third World' (Desforges 1998: 176). Therefore, tourism is not a departure from everyday experience, as Urry (2002) has suggested. Rather, tourism is an extension of tourists' daily routine, and the practices of imagination and consumption build a socio-spatial connection between tourism landscapes in destinations and the wider consumer society. Drawing on these arguments, I frame two specific questions to address the imagination of destinations: To what extent do mass media messages influence tourists' expectation and imagination of the destinations they plan to visit? How does tourists' consumption challenge or reinforce the established discursive representation of tourism landscapes?

Secondly, the circuits of tourism need more empirical analysis. According to Ateljevic (2000), tourism production and consumption operate in a form of endless and dynamic circular processes in which tourists can become the 'producer' in two ways: (1) by generating new meanings and interpretations; or (2) by using their purchasing power to influence tourism producers to shape tourism services and landscapes to cater to their special demands. Furthermore, Ateljevic (2000) employs a Gramscian notion of hegemony to illustrate the common sense between producers and consumers through which tourism is made possible, arguing that the production and consumption of tourism operate in a form of endless circular process. Thus, the circuits of tourism rest upon the continuing negotiations 'between interests, infrastructures and social relations of production, and consumption forces of changing class, gender, race, locality and cultural distinctions of motivation and taste within the potential population of visitors' (Ateljevic 2000: 377). Putting tourists in the circuits can unpack the active possibilities of these ordinary people to transform and maintain meanings and spaces in the course of tourism production and consumption (see, for example, Edensor 2000; Selby 2004). Ateljevic's studies of circuits of tourism allow for a close examination of the interplay of production and consumption in the whole process of tourism and point to the socio-spatial connections between tourism destination and the wider consumer society.

This paper addresses these gaps by analysing the imagination and consumption of Lijiang's heritage landscapes. It shows that tourism consumption indeed dwells in the endless negotiations between tourists' imagination, their economic and cultural capital, and the norms and values in destinations. Following Ateljevic's work on circuits of tourism, this paper aims to make a modest contribution to understanding the nature of tourism consumption. I argue that the nature of tourism consumption is built upon two propositions. First, tourism consumption helps to build a socio-spatial connection between destinations and the wider consumer society; and, secondly, it enables tourists to become an active group to shape the production and representation of tourism landscapes. This focus on imagination and consumption provides a useful way to draw together work on tourism consumption, and establishes connections to well-developed ideas concerning consumption in geography and cultural studies.

Specifically, this paper has two objectives. First, it will analyse the touristic imagination of Lijiang Ancient Town and examine how this imagination shapes tourists' practices of consumption. This examination will reveal that the mass media produces discursive representations of Lijiang and articulates an imagined geography through which tourists view and perceive Lijiang. The imagination and perception constitute tourists' prejudgement and expectation, or 'lay geographical knowledge' (Crouch 1999: 3) to instruct tourists' actual practices of consumption in Lijiang. Nevertheless, tourism consumption should not be understood as being predetermined, inevitably static and completely rationalized. The concrete practices of consumption are not directly deduced either from the objective structures, defined as the totality of the stimuli to invoke tourists' interests of travelling, or from the conditions in tourism destinations that tourists conform to. Rather, these practices 'account for both the individual's material condition and specific experience but at the same time situate the individual into the political and economic structures of power, conflict and resistance' (Ateljevic 2000: 373).

The paper's second objective is to explore the multi-sensory practices of consumption and the ways these practices transform Lijiang's tourism space. I will explain the socio-spatial connections that make tourism sites disrupted and transformed into, not placeless places, but places connected to images of *other* places via the influences of global consumer cultures (Coleman and Crang 2002). By placing the practices of tourism consumption in these wide structures, this paper helps researchers to critically understand not only the multi-sensory practices of tourism consumption, but also the ways in which tourists are indispensable actors working with others to transform or maintain tourism spaces. By doing so, this paper shifts attention from the debates on the representation of consumption space to the material culture of consumption. This shift addresses Mansvelt's (2009: 270) call for more analysis on 'how consumer practice, subjectivities and experiences provide a means of transforming structures of individuality, community and social relations'. Bek *et al.* (2007: 310), in discussing the role of consumers as drivers of change, argue that consumers are playing ever greater roles in 'influencing practices at the point of production in a range of industries across the globe'. This argument applies equally to the tourism industry.

The rest of the paper is organized into three major sections. The first section presents research methods which included a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. The second section analyses the imagination of Lijiang in mass media and in tourists' mind as well. It attempts to link imagination to concrete practices of consumption onsite and unravel 'the wider (con)text which creates demand for tourism consumption' (Ateljevic 2000: 377). The third section offers a detailed analysis of the consumption of tourism through gazing, touching and listening. The central thesis is that all these practices of consumption are embedded in social, cultural and economic communication between tourists and producers. It further reveals how these practices are fed back into production to fulfill the circuits of tourism. The concluding section

summarizes the main observations of this paper and calls for a holistic perspective to further an understanding of the imagination and consumption of tourism.

Research Methods

Lijiang Ancient Town in southwest China connects the Han majority in China to the Tibetan cultures. Being a home for an ethnic minority group (called Naxi) for over eight hundred years, the town is situated on a flatland 2,400 m above sea level, with the Yulong Snow Mountain as a natural barrier that practically isolates Lijiang from the rest of China. Eight hundred years of continuous evolvement endowed the town with a distinct built environment that won it World Heritage site status in 1997 (Figure 1). Due to its attractiveness, Lijiang Ancient Town has been witnessing rapid tourism development since the middle 1980s. In 1992, the number of Lijiang's tourist arrivals was 200,000. It surpassed three million in 2003 and reached as high as 4.6 million in 2006 (Lijiang Bureau of Statistics 2007; Wang 2007). Domestic tourists, overwhelmingly identified as the Han majority, accounted for over 95 percent of Lijiang's tourism market. They mainly come from the wealthy provinces of Guangdong, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Beijing, and from neighbouring Sichuan Province.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between September and December 2004 and again in June 2007. Multiple methods were employed to collect data. To



Figure 1. Lijiang's townscape. *Source:* author's photo.

Table 1. Demographic profile of survey sample (%)

Demographics	Domestic tourists		International tourists	
	Sample	Official Lijiang statistics (2003)	Sample	Official Lijiang statistics (2003)
Gender				
Male	49.2	NA	56.1	NA
Female	50.8	NA	43.9	NA
Age (years)				
19 and below	2.6	5.2	1.1	4.1
20–9	49.2	32.7	36.7	30.1
30–9	32.7	30.1	20.6	31.5
40–9	11.2	18.5	19.4	20.6
50–9	3.6	6.7	11.1	12.3
60 and above	0.7	6.8	11.1	1.4
Educational attainment				
No formal education	0.7	0.7	0	NA
Primary and lower secondary	0.7	1.6	2.2	NA
Upper secondary/pre-college	21.8	23.6	16.7	NA
Diploma and degree	76.9	74.1	81.1	NA
Occupation				
Company employee	40.9	32.4	15.6	13.7
Businessperson	8.3	9.3	13.9	10.4
National serviceman	20.8	31.1	3.9	5.2
Professional	12.5	8.2	31.7	41.2
Housewife	0	0	2.2	1.1
Students	5.6	7.0	18.9	6.6
Retired/unemployed	0.7	5.1	7.8	11.8
Others	11.2	6.9	6.1	10.0

Source: Lijiang Tourism Bureau (2005); author's data.

ascertain how tourists understand Lijiang's heritage landscapes, secondary sources were used for reference, including brochures, websites, message boards and newspapers. A quantitative survey involving domestic and foreign tourists was also carried out to collect their views on heritage. The questionnaires were available in three languages – Mandarin, English and Japanese – given according to the respondents' preference. The profile of the respondents is given in Table 1. The response rate for the domestic tourist survey was 91.8 percent (303 out of 330 questionnaires were usable); the rate for the international tourist survey was 90 percent (180 out of 200 questionnaires usable).

In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with domestic and international tourists. These interviews were arranged through informal contacts or the author's personal social relations in Lijiang. This arrangement facilitated obtaining

Table 2. Profile of qualitative interviewees

	Sex ^a	Age ^b	Origin	Nights of stay	Occupation ^c
International tourists					
Respondent 1	M	60	Canada	2	R
Respondent 2	F	30	UK	2	NS
Respondent 3	M	30	Argentina	2	CE
Respondent 4	M	30	Macau SAR	4	P
Respondent 5	M	40	Canada	2	B
Respondent 6	F	42	Canada	2	CE
Respondent 7	M	30	Malaysia	10	B
Respondent 8	F	50	France	2	P
Respondent 9	M	35	Australia	4	CE
Respondent 10	F	30	Israel	3	P
Domestic tourists ^d					
Respondent 11	M	35	Beijing	3	CE
Respondent 12	F	33	Beijing	3	CE
Respondent 13	F	30	Hunan	5	P
Respondent 14	M	35	Beijing	3	CE
Respondent 15	M	40	Guangdong	3	P
Respondent 16	F	26	Yunnan	3	S
Respondent 17	M	35	Guangdong	15	CE
Respondent 18	F	20	Beijing	3	S

^aM, Male; F, Female.

^bAge was given or estimated.

^cB, Businessperson; CE, Company Employee; NS, National Service; P, Professional; R, Retired; S, Student.

^dAll domestic tourists are Han people.

Source: author's data.

their voices without external intervention. In addition, one interview was done by email. Altogether, 18 interviews were garnered (Table 2).

In Lijiang, tourists are far from a homogeneous group and, therefore, their consumption generates many different spatial outcomes. This paper differentiates domestic and international tourists because their habitual schemes of consumption, including their imagination and consumption preferences, are influenced by different social conditions and cultural tradition (see below). In Lijiang's tourism market, the domestic tourists are in a dominant position due to their stronger purchasing power and more visits in comparison with the foreign tourists. This differentiation aims to show the various connections between Lijiang and the global consumer culture and to allow for a more in-depth discussion of the practices of tourism consumption.

Before proceeding further, I offer a brief note on the cultural contextualization of Chinese tourists. Since Deng Xiaoping launched economic reform in 1978, Chinese people have gained more and more opportunities as tourists to travel to other

places. Especially after 1998, the central government consolidated its efforts to advance domestic tourism after the Chinese economy suffered a modest crisis caused by overproduction and over-reliance on exports. Yet the notion of tourism in Chinese culture is different from Western tourism. As Nyíri (2006: 58) observes, China has long been devoid of 'the distinctly modern, romantic, exploratory, and self-bettering discourses of tourism that emerged in the West after the Enlightenment'. This observation has two implications. First, in post-Mao China, the state has concentrated on the production and consumption of tourism in order to maintain political control over people's quotidian life (see, for example, Oakes 1998; Sofield and Lee 1998; Nyíri 2006). Secondly, for Chinese tourists, the search for authenticity has not been a major concern, giving way to the play for vacuous fun and self-imposed performance (Xie 2003). They very rarely embed themselves in a local natural environment and a pure form of life, nor do they develop deeper communication with local people at these destinations (Chan 2006). Nevertheless, we should be cautious of regarding Chinese tourists as a homogeneous group with shared preferences of consumption.

Imagination of Lijiang

The power of the mass media in the construction of tourism space and landscapes is well documented (Hughes 1991; Crouch *et al.* 2005). The media portrays selective images about destinations, together with imaginative and cognitive activities, to shape tourists' perceptions and expectations. For instance, Avraham and First (2006) point out that the national press plays an important role in constructing the Israeli geographical periphery as the Other, in an attempt to marginalize it as strange and unimportant. Minca (2007) examines how *Lonely Planet's* predominantly Orientalist images of the Jamaa el Fna Square in Morocco shape tourist practices of gazing and performance at the square. He argues that tourist practices, such as gazing upon the real Moroccan landscape while sipping a mint tea, turn the square into an iconic landscape in which tourists can be said to be searching for 'a lost oriental innocence and ready-made exoticism', in concurrence with Orientalist imaginations of Morocco (Minca 2007: 445). Consequently, Crouch *et al.* (2005) argue that tourism consumption involves an imaginative process in which tourists develop various perceptions of the world and will conduct their tourism practice accordingly.

Having noted the importance of the mass media in constructing tourism images, I also acknowledge the various roles played by other actors in this process. These actors include international organizations, such as UNESCO and state agencies at different levels. In the Chinese context, tourism brokers, such as professional tour guides and native interlocutors, are particularly important in informing Chinese domestic tourists where to go and the meaning of sites. All in all, I share Nyíri's (2006: 83) argument that the making of tourists in general, and Chinese tourists in particular, is a project in which 'the state, the media, and the market play complementary roles'. To understand how the touristic imagination of Lijiang influences the practice of

Table 3. Information sources^a

	Domestic tourists (n = 303)		International tourists (n = 180)	
	no.	% ^b	no.	% ^b
Books/magazine/newspaper	154	50.8	62	34.4
Videos/television/radio	141	46.5	7	3.9
Friends or family members	139	45.9	65	36.1
Internet	90	29.7	37	20.6
Brochures/travel guide	35	11.6	115	63.9

^aMore than one answer may be given by each respondent.

^bPercentage of total respondents rather than percentage of total answers given by respondents.

Source: author's data.

tourism consumption, I will analyse how Lijiang is imagined in the mass media and how tourists imagine Lijiang after they receive the mass media messages.

Domestic and international tourists were observed to have explicitly different ways of obtaining information about Lijiang Ancient Town (Table 3). For domestic tourists, visual media (videos, television, radio; cited by 50.8% of respondents) and print media (books, magazine, newspaper; cited by 46.5% of respondents) were the two top information resources. Numerous reports in the national mass media typically portray Lijiang as an 'Oriental Venice' with 'a unique culture and a long history of over 800 years' (*China Daily* 2006). The imagination of Lijiang is made to centre on tradition, sublime landscapes, a unique Naxi culture and a slow pace of life:

Lijiang's uniqueness lies in the harmony between human being [sic] and nature in the town. Its environment is very congenial and the town is full of scenic and poetic landscapes (*People's Daily* 2002).

It [Lijiang Ancient Town] is perfectly adapted to the uneven topography of this key commercial and strategic site, [and] has been maintained as an exceptionally authentic, historic townscape. Its architecture is famed for the fusion of elements from several cultures that have come together at this site over many centuries (*China Daily* 2007).

The images presented by these newspapers and others act as markers of tourist desirability to construct an imagined geography of what Lijiang should be like and what tourists can encounter in Lijiang (Smith and Duffy 2003). Furthermore, these media images construct a popularly habitual scheme which instructs tourists' practices of consumption by an underlying consensus about what to do.

Television has also played an important role in popularizing Lijiang to potential domestic tourists. Several television series spot Lijiang in their backdrops. For example, the television series *Yimi Yangguan* (literally, 'One-metre-long Sunlight') leaves

viewers with an imagination of Lijiang Ancient Town as romantic and convivial to couples seeking true love. As a result, Lijiang has become one of China's best destinations to celebrate Valentine's Day (*People's Daily* 2006). Television (in both series and documentary), and the visual media generally, present Lijiang's heritage landscapes in a way which 'directly captures the immediate moment, which offers truth and participation, or at least appears to do so' (Lefebvre 1991: 41). The 'truth' and 'participation' is nostalgia, romance and tradition. These meanings 'regulate social [and spatial] practices, influence people's conduct, and consequently have real practical effects' (Kim and Richardson 2003: 219). Unsurprisingly, a domestic tourist's (Anonymous 2006) internet blog had this to say:

I visited Lijiang two years ago and followed the footprints in *Yimi Yangguan* to seek something. I went to the guesthouse, Sifang Square and the bar. The only feeling is that I don't want to leave [Lijiang] and I really hope to return [to Lijiang].

This tourist's search for *Yimi Yangguan*, similar to many other tourists' expectations, reflects the power of the mass media in shaping tourists' imagination of Lijiang and their practices as well.

The constitutive power which is granted to the imagination of Lijiang by the mass media lies not in the imagined geography itself, 'but in the group which authorizes it and invests it with authority' (Bourdieu 1977: 21). Through constructing the messages of imagining and representing Lijiang and listing various travel tips, the mass media, in line with Lijiang's tourism enterprise, can frame a regular situation where existing discursive and institutional norms shape tourists' expectation and consumption of Lijiang's heritage landscapes. This paper argues that these norms are not only about what tourists want to consume, but aim to make sure that tourists develop a *common sense* about what to do and how to do it. By portraying what Lijiang is like and formulating the classic views of Lijiang's famous landscapes, the mass media convert it into saleable sights for tourists to consume. By following these norms in the field, tourists obtain a degree of competence (or what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital') and use their consumption to reproduce these recognizable norms. This point has been captured by Culler (1981: 127) who argues that tourists are like semioticians, 'fanning out in search of signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs'. Furthermore, they develop 'a world of common sense' (Bourdieu 1989: 19) to imagine Lijiang and bolster a collective logic of actions.

The mass media messages have been ingrained into tourists' minds. By far, the most popular imagination centres on Lijiang as a historical city frozen in time. Lijiang Ancient Town is the antithesis of modernity, a place described by Respondent 11 (Beijing male, 35) as naïvely unreal. He frankly admitted that he did not oppose the 'locals owning refrigerators and television sets' but he also had a romanticized

imagination that all locals, even if they were backward and poor, led fulfilling and happy lives. Similarly, Respondent 17 from Guangdong expressed his anxiety: 'I always like this place and come here annually. Lijiang has the lifestyle I dream of. I don't want to see a changed Lijiang and I hope it still remains in its traditional form'. All domestic tourists in the interviews spoke of a need to experience tourism landscapes quite the opposite of their hectic routine lives in modern cities. In their minds, Lijiang's heritage landscapes are symbols of tradition, of authentic countryside that is pure, simple, unadulterated and appealing. Lijiang is a place for Chinese tourists to indulge in the myth of Otherness (Craik 1997) and exoticism (Wang 1999) in which nostalgia must prevail over the relentless urbanization and modernization experienced all over the country. For many Chinese tourists from the rich coastal cities, Lijiang represents ambivalent modernity cast as a struggle between 'utopia and dystopia' (Meethan 2004: 23). Their imagination of Lijiang, together with their corresponding practices of consumption, transforms Lijiang into a place replete with commodification.

Unlike domestic tourists, however, international tourists relied more on brochures and tour guides (Table 3). More notably, *Lonely Planet* popularized Lijiang to the overseas community by dramatizing it as a place: '[c]riss-crossed by canals and a maze of narrow streets, the old town is not to be missed' (1988: 699). Other global media emphasize the same. 'Cobbled streets run between tiled wooden two storey houses with tip-tilted eaves, flanked by streams of clean, clear running water. At night thousands of red lanterns cast their warm glow. . . . Imagine Venice in July. Think theme park' (*BBC News* 2006); 'I prowled the back streets, wandering along a path that led uphill, to a tall wooden pagoda called Wangulou, which I climbed for an incredible view of the old village's panorama of graceful tiled rooftops' (*The New York Times* 2001). Again, these media messages have an influence on tourists' imagination. Some international tourists imagined Lijiang as a 'small village' (Respondent 3, Argentinean male, 30).

So you read books. They say [Lijiang is] . . . beautiful, historic, beautiful rivers, trees, water and you think, oh, it looks very beautiful. And then you say, oh, it is a world heritage site. And you go. It *must* be good (Respondent 6, Canadian female, 40).

In Thorn Tree Forum of *Lonely Planet*, a tourist (Anonymous 2007) commented that 'Lijiang to me was like Disney does China. [I] imagine a quaint old Chinese town with every last building converted into a souvenir shop, utterly drained of all authenticity, UNESCO should be told'. These tourists describe the landscapes they expected to encounter and experience in Lijiang. Different from domestic tourists, they seem to prioritize aesthetics and fun over a retreat from the humdrum of modern life.

Through promotional messages about Lijiang, the mass media and tourism developers arbitrarily create the representation of Lijiang's heritage landscapes, making it naturalized in the tourism market and acceptable to tourists as ways of doing tourism. By linking Lijiang with tradition, primitiveness and authenticity in their imagination, tourists comply with the mass media and 'substitute illusory for real stimuli' (Campbell 1987: 203). Once tourists bring these messages back to Lijiang and accept them as part of quotidian embodiment, their imagination makes new socio-spatial configurations in Lijiang and the actual practices of consumption, embedded in photographs, souvenirs and other memories, framing spatial connections between Lijiang and their hometowns. The whole journey reaches a crescendo as soon as their imagination is fulfilled.

Consuming Lijiang

One of the most influential topics concerning tourism consumption is the tourist gaze which Urry (2002) theorizes as a socially organized system of signs for tourists to collect at destinations. For Urry (2002: 1), tourism consumption is to 'gaze upon or view a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes which are out of the ordinary' for transient departure from established routines and practices of everyday life. The tourist gaze frames the hegemony of gazing as a practice of tourism consumption, saying little about other senses in the consumption experience (Lorimer 2005; Minca 2007).

However, there are other equally strong senses of practice at work in enriching tourists' experience. Crouch (2000: 70) advocates that tourists use multi-sensory practices to develop lay geographical knowledge so that they can have a sense of 'abutting a surrounding world and thereby of engaging that world of people, materiality and so on'. For Crouch, the tourist gaze is only one way in which tourists engage in the material world. This theme is taken up by Everett (2008), who discusses how the 'tastescape' of food tourism contributes to tourists' multi-sensory experience of and embodied engagement with destinations. Saldanha (2002) reflects on the ways in which tourists engage in music tourism for embodied experience in Goa, India. Thus, Cosgrove (2003: 265) argues for a movement away from 'the confines of the visual towards more imaginative and encompassing embodiments that are at once sensual and cognitive'. In terms of tourism consumption, this movement towards the sensual and cognitive refers to 'what is done rather than what is represented' (Minca 2007: 439), which allows integration of other senses beyond the visual into the practices of consumption (Lorimer 2005; Edensor 2006). Considering Lijiang, this paper examines the practices of tourism consumption based on visual, tactile and auditory senses; accordingly, the activities include gazing, touching and listening.

The main activities of international and domestic tourists in Lijiang Ancient Town have been summarized in Table 4. The results affirm that sightseeing and photography are the two main components which constitute the 'must' in the tourist experience.

Table 4. Main activities undertaken by tourists^a

	Domestic tourists (<i>n</i> = 303)		International tourists (<i>n</i> = 180)	
	no.	% ^b	no.	% ^b
Gazing				
Sightseeing	260	85.8	154	85.6
Photography	201	66.3	153	85.0
Touching				
Shopping	225	74.3	115	63.9
Dancing	148	48.8	9	5.0
Dining	141	46.5	155	86.1
Living in a guesthouse	113	37.3	80	44.4
Visiting Mu Palace	85	28.1	32	17.8
Drinking or eating in a bar	83	27.4	114	63.3
Town tour via horseback	32	10.6	3	1.7
Listening				
Attending Naxi musical show	46	15.2	61	33.9
Others	5	1.7	6	3.3

^aMore than one answer may be given by each respondent.

^bPercentage of total respondents rather than percentage of total answers made by respondents.

Source: author's data.

They are what de Certeau (cited in Jackson and Holbrook 1995: 1928) describes as an 'exercise in ubiquity'.

Sightseeing is gazing. Tourists come to the site of Lijiang to gaze at precisely the heritage landscapes mentioned in the brochures, guidebooks and other media they have come across. They discern artefacts, including buildings and bridges, and vivid symbols of Naxi culture like attire and pictography, for consumption. These elements confirm their romanticized imagination of local heritage and society. Sightseeing not only exemplifies tourists' willingness to glimpse, see or stare at these objects through their own eyes, but also enables tourists to collect sights to daydream and contemplate 'an "artefactual" history, in which various kinds of *social* experiences are in effect ignored or trivialised' (Urry 2002: 102, original emphasis). Respondent 10 (Israeli female, 30) described her practice:

Lijiang old town is very very nice. I walked two days in Lijiang. Lijiang is a very nice place because you are never bored around. I have been to most sites in the town. Just now I decided to take a rest here to watch tourists. Also very interesting.

Through sightseeing, tourists in Lijiang liken their original imagination of Lijiang to the visual presentation of heritage landscapes so that they can enrich their experience.

If sightseeing allows tourists to fulfill their daydreaming and imagination, photography gives them a chance to capture and freeze Lijiang's images as their own possession. Many scholars have asserted the close relation between photographing and tourist experience. For instance, Edensor (1998: 129) remarks that 'photography is a strategy to recode and enframe experience'. Snapshots help tourists to collect visual signs for remembering and to inscribe their feeling and identity in time and space in relation to Lijiang Ancient Town. Respondent 4 (Macau male, 30) highlighted the importance of photography:

Although I am alone, I don't feel it bothers me. I take my camera everywhere, no matter [whether] it is attractive or not. If the feeling comes, I just take a picture. Later on I go back to my home and see the pictures and still enjoy them. As I told you, I have taken more than five hundred pictures.

Here, this tourist makes a connection between the practices *during* and *after* his Lijiang visit. The images he captured have eternalized his imagination of Lijiang. Photographing Lijiang was for him the main way to remember the objects he encountered and to incorporate his cultural capital into his practice of consumption, including his skills of snapshots and his preference for heritage landscapes.

In Lijiang, Chinese domestic tourists are much more likely to place themselves in the landscapes and pose for photographs than their Western counterparts. This finding indicates different expressions of the tourist gaze. Chinese domestic tourists' preference is to both use their eyes to gaze upon heritage landscapes in Lijiang and, more importantly, to get involved in the field and be part of it. This involvement in tourism is captured by Xie (2003) in his study of Chinese domestic tourists in the bamboo-beating dance in Hainan. Moreover, photographs with their poses verify their improvised performance in play and demonstrate their pleasure to their friends when they return home. In a different vein, Western tourists in Lijiang, however, gaze upon heritage landscapes from a manageable distance. They document what they have seen, but avoid being part of the tourism image.

For tourists, photographing is an integral device to display their habitus and skill in capturing the object of their gaze. Tourists' photos help a great deal to mould Lijiang's heritage landscapes into iconic images that depict nostalgia (historical buildings), nature (water, mountains, trees and gardens) and the exotic (Naxi ethnic group). This association can be traced back to tourists' imagination of Lijiang *before* their visit and, furthermore, influence how Lijiang's heritage landscapes should be constructed. Thus, photography completes what Albers and James (1988: 136) call the 'hermeneutic circle', starting with tourists' imagination of place and ending with their productions of the very same images by snapshots *in situ*. Armed with these images, tourists consciously track down the locations during their visit. During the fieldwork, I personally observed many tourists taking photos of the same images that are circulated through the internet and visual media. These tourists carried on their practices of

photographing, 'without either explicit reason or signifying intent' (Bourdieu 1977: 79). They followed the established norms about which images should be photographed and adjusted themselves to other tourists' practices of photographing.

Nevertheless, the practice of photographing cannot be understood as an automatic replay of procedures established by the mass media and tourism developers. In Lijiang, tourists have autonomy to take photos of what they like to capture, only if their time, cameras, weather and skills permit them. No matter how they photograph Lijiang's heritage landscapes, the main themes in tourists' photos reiterate tradition, sublime landscapes and unique Naxi culture and lifestyle. These themes largely accord with Lijiang's images portrayed in the mass media. Therefore, although tourists usually conduct their practices of consumption in accordance with norms in the field, they occasionally deviate from the usual route and improvise their activities. Yet, such activities are also 'liable to be folded back into familiar routines' (Edensor 2007: 204) in line with the mainstream tourism consumer culture in Lijiang.

Their practice of photographing feeds back into the production of heritage landscapes. In order to engender the 'repertoire of actions' that involves photographing and the reproduction of these images (Crawshaw and Urry 1997: 183), Lijiang's heritage authority has beautified the architectural facades along the main streets of Lijiang and clearly marked spots which are appropriate for tourists to take photos. The authority even requires all female employees in the tourism sector to wear colourful Naxi attire that has inevitably become a popular subject for snapshots. The authority also employs people to display Lijiang's traditional craft at work about the town so that tourists can capture these employees via their cameras. All these operations help to reduce Lijiang's heritage landscapes into an aestheticized tourist space which is devoid of real people and social reality and replaced instead by sanitized symbols of Naxi heritage. Furthermore, the circulation of Lijiang's postcards all over the world and the popularity of photos about Lijiang on the internet encourage tourists to visit Lijiang for the same consumption. Lijiang's images are put up and circulated by external organizations (such as UNESCO), world-renowned tour books (such as *Lonely Planet*) and travel agents who have the endorsement of the state which is trying very hard to promote tourism in Lijiang because of the tourist dollars that can be earned. In this turn, the consumers, namely the tourists, both domestic and international, reproduce the norms immanent in the objective conditions where the global media and tourism developers frame their imagination and actual practices.

Among the many ways of touching Lijiang, shopping is the most popular (Table 4). Every day, thousands of tourists patronize the shops in the town and purchase souvenirs. The main things they buy include trinkets, key chains, silverware, local specialties like Yunnan tea, and the Naxi costume (author's observation). Tourists purchase these souvenirs either for themselves to remember their Lijiang trip or for their friends and relatives as a gift, as shown by the following tourists' comments:

We bought some souvenirs with Dongba pictographic words. We will give them away. Well, it is not good if you don't buy anything after you visit a place. The

Dongba souvenirs I give at least signify my sincerity. My friends will appreciate this novelty (Respondent 12, Beijing female, 33).

[The souvenirs I bought were] just for my girl friend. . . . I buy something for her (Respondent 4, Macau male, 30).

I bought many souvenirs. Some are gifts for other people; some are for myself (Respondent 7, Malaysian male, 30).

For these tourists, bringing shopping into their consumption results in a socio-spatial connection between themselves, the people around them, the traders and locals in Lijiang, and their friends and family back home. Their comments have several implications. First, shopping integrates tourists' economic capital into concrete practice in the tourism field of Lijiang. Being a real need, shopping provides tourists with opportunities to be in close touch with other actors in the tourism industry. In fact, shopping is important to tourists 'as an area of spending and as an incentive for travelling' (Martin and Mason 1987: 96). As Respondent 12 mentioned, it is her *duty* to shop. Using their economic power, tourists purchase various services and souvenirs so that their practices of shopping transform the town into a space of consumption, a space showing many connections with shopping malls and department stores in tourists' hometowns. Thus, Respondent 14 asked: 'What is the difference between Lijiang and a shopping mall?' As an important part of tourists' routine life and their consumption practices in the tourism destinations, shopping seamlessly forges a socio-spatial connection between Lijiang and tourist-sending locations and brings the town into the orbit of global consumerism.

While shopping integrates tourists' economic and cultural capital into concrete practices, it is not a purely economic transaction between tourists and traders. Instead, it is 'a social activity built around social exchange' (Shields 1992: 102). Souvenirs given to friends are a means of asserting tourists' identity through their personal taste in selecting souvenirs and their economic ability to afford them. They verify their habitual schemes by offering other people a chance to enlarge their horizons. As a visit to Lijiang becomes 'in vogue' in contemporary China (*People's Daily* 2002), domestic tourists feel the need to use souvenirs to tell others that they are part of the mainstream consumer society. Thus, souvenirs should be distinctive and should convey strong local meanings. Respondent 12 complained, 'What I really want to buy is some unique souvenir relevant to Naxi ethnicity, which . . . cannot be found in other places. But the choice is very limited'.

Therefore, shopping in Lijiang and the souvenirs that tourists purchase become important 'symbols of the acquired cultural capital of the travel experience' and further act as 'touchstones of memory' to foster a socio-spatial connection between Lijiang and tourists' home place (Morgan and Pritchard 2005: 39–41). This significance of shopping and acquiring souvenirs is also documented by Ateljevic and Doorne (2003) in their study of the socio-spatial relations embedded in the journey of souvenirs from China's Yunnan Province to New Zealand. What these authors

neglect to note, however, is how shopping for souvenirs is fed back into the process of production.

Then, again, we easily see how the desire for shopping is rightly captured by tourism producers in Lijiang. For instance, more than one thousand shops crowd along the main streets and the town centre – Sifang Square – to provide all sorts of souvenirs, services and crafts to meet tourists' demand for uniqueness and remembering. To activate tourists' spending in shopping settings, souvenir shop owners incorporate local cultural symbols, such as pictographic words, into T-shirts and silver trinkets to remind tourists of the uniqueness of Lijiang Ancient Town. The local heritage authority regulates that all souvenirs sold in the town should be related to Lijiang's heritage and ethnic culture. Furthermore, the authority also carefully preserves all built heritage along the tourist routes in the town so that tourists have a unique experience of shopping, different from what they encounter in their hometowns. From this vantage point, shopping turns Lijiang Ancient Town into a site which fuses an outdoor mall with a Disney-like heritage theme park encrusted with many signs of Naxi heritage.

Apart from shopping as a form of touching, other 'touching' activities include dancing, dining, visiting Mu Palace (a completely reconstructed building complex to simulate the seat of power of the ruling elites in the past), a town tour via horseback, and so on. Tourists want to touch either material landscapes (such as the Mu Palace and the traditional guesthouses) or the vernacular landscapes (such as local Naxi dance, food and horseback transport). Many tourists, regardless of their nationality, preferred to stay in a guesthouse in the ancient town. As Respondent 1 (Canadian male, 60) mentioned, 'The building is beautiful. I am staying in a courtyard guesthouse, very *traditional*, and it is a good experience. I feel that I experience the authentic ancient culture of Lijiang'. For tourists such as Respondent 1, the experience of 'connecting across time, space and social hierarchies . . . [i]s deeply meaningful' (Harrison 2003: 69) since the practice of staying and living in a guesthouse fulfils their imagination of Lijiang as traditional and authentic. More importantly, this practice provides the economic justification for the preservation of these landscapes in Lijiang because the local government and tourism developer can reap economic returns from tourists. Therefore, tourists do not frame tourism sites on their own, but they build the socio-spatial connection by feeding their imagination and preferences into the production of tourism, and bring these sites into the orbit of global consumerism.

The final consumption practice is listening. Tourists attend musical concerts to listen to Naxi music. As reported by the respondents, 15.2 percent of domestic tourists and 33.9 percent of international tourists attended concerts (see Table 4). Tourists had the following response: 'The music is very interesting. I think it is very important although we cannot understand what we hear all the time. It is a very good cultural experience' (Respondent 6, Canadian female, 40). Because Naxi music is unique, the musical performances in the town attract hundreds of tourists every night. While some tourists can appreciate the music, for most – even domestic

tourists – attending a local music concert is merely for the purpose of increasing cultural capital. It becomes a conversation piece for tourists when they return home, as Respondent 1 (Canadian male, 60) mentioned: ‘I like the Naxi music show. [It is] very good and the artists too. To me, it is a part of the world heritage site. I came to watch the artists and hear the music, and meet the traditional people’. Through listening, this tourist concluded that Lijiang can still be regarded as a heritage site because of the presence of ‘traditional’ music performed by ‘traditional people’. This combination comprises part of his ‘imagined geography of [heritage] authenticity’ (Desforges 2001: 358).

Arguably, tourists can use their economic capital to transform Lijiang’s heritage landscapes in terms of their habitual schemes and to work with tourism producers to forge how the landscapes are to be presented. This argument is slightly different from MacCannell’s (1976) viewpoint that tourism producers purposefully arrange staged social space in tourist settings and tourists are merely the receivers of this arrangement. Tourists’ imagination and practices are usually shaped by and reproduce representations created by the tourism industry and mass media, but tourists also harness their purchasing power to feed their imagination and their consumption preferences back into the production of heritage landscape and, thus, contribute to the ways in which places are represented and constituted (Edensor 1998).

Lijiang’s heritage landscapes, including historical buildings, the complex canal system, Naxi attire, streets paved with cobblestone, dance, music and so on, are the spatial outcomes of negotiations between tourists who conduct consumption and producers who help to crystallize and maintain these landscapes that generate profit in the tourism industry. Specifically, the touristic imagination of Lijiang as tradition, primitiveness and exoticism has been reflected in tourists’ practices of gazing, touching and listening and, furthermore, incarnated in the presentation of Lijiang’s heritage landscapes. This finding is substantiated by Wang’s (2007) observation that the tourists who spend their nights in the guesthouses in Lijiang find and embrace self-related authenticity as they subconsciously search for ‘home’. They engage in a combined authenticity which entails ‘a preoccupied imagery of “otherness” in an exotic place and an inherent pursuit of a sense of home with familiarity (Wang 2007: 797). What Wang did not mention, however, is that this engagement enables tourists to get this consumption fed back into the production of heritage, justifying the existence of Lijiang’s exotic, but familiar, heritage landscapes.

Conclusion

Writing about tourism consumption, Edensor (2007: 199) argues that as an extension of the quotidian, tourism is ‘an exemplary site for an exploration of the ways in which the everyday is replete with unreflexive practice and habit but simultaneously provokes desires for unconfined alterity’. This paper provides theoretical advancement and empirical evidence to substantiate Edensor’s argument. It has shown how tourists

imagine and consume Lijiang's heritage landscapes and how their consumption is fed back into Lijiang's heritage production. Drawing on Ateljevic's work on circuits of tourism, the paper reveals that tourists imagine Lijiang as a destination with nostalgic history and with nature that is not threatened by human existence. Tourists' imagination plays an important role in instructing their consumption. This paper further reveals that tourism consumption includes gazing, touching and listening. Through gazing, tourists capture the beauty of Lijiang's historical buildings and the customs and traditions of the Naxi people; through touching, they build economic and social connections with Lijiang's inhabitants; through listening, they develop more engagement with local culture to verify that Lijiang is, indeed, unique. Tourists' consumption is also fed back into heritage production. In order to satisfy tourists, the local government and tourism businesses stage Lijiang's heritage landscapes to conform to tourists' imagination and expectation for the authentic, the traditional and the sublime.

What, then, are the implications for understanding the nature of tourism consumption? The first implication we can draw from this study is that tourism consumption is embedded within the circuits of tourism involving representation and promotion, imagination, service provision, multi-sensory practices of consumption and post-trip remembering and sharing. This embeddedness arises because tourists are social beings whose consciousness and practices are implicated in the dialectic between a wider context (structure) and their cultural and economic capability (agency). As Ateljevic (2000: 376) argues, the imagination and consumption of tourism is a socially constructed practice 'defined and accepted by those who produce and consume it, socially sanctioned by institutions, customs, rules, ideals and values'. Therefore, tourists have no full freedom of choice nor they are completely conditioned as passive consumers. The common sense developed through their knowledge and imagination of the destination, in combination with the social norms that the field unfolds, enables tourists to have forms of competence and to develop a sense of doing tourism skilfully and tactically, without much reflection and consciousness (Bourdieu 1977).

Another implication for understanding tourism consumption is that tourism consumption establishes the socio-spatial connection between tourism sites and a wider consumer society, and forges a touring culture that regulates and guides future tourists. For instance, the economic capital (purchasing power) that tourists possess sets up the conditions for them to conduct consumption practices, on the one hand, and fosters economic relations between the destinations and the global tourism industry on the other. Tourism consumption does not happen in an isolated island, but becomes embedded in local social and economic relations and plays an important role in shaping the representation and production of heritage landscapes.

Different tourism destinations and tourist groups would require a different exploration of how consumption practices are conducted and how these practices are fed back into the process of production. Certainly, the case of Lijiang illustrates that consumption practices 'contribute to the ways in which places are constituted' (Shaw

and Williams 2004: 23) and reinforce the hegemonic order underlying the production and representation of destinations. The consumption of tourism is not a spontaneous process, but rather one born out of complex exchanges, competitions and collaborations between tourists and local groups, as well as national and international forces. To carve out an understanding of tourism consumption, unpacking the circuits of tourism into a holistic perspective has been helpful.

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