

Visiting Speaker Series 2016-17 Term 2

Purifying the Frontier: Tourist Projects of Bordering in Guizhou

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15 Mar 2017 (Wednesday)

4:00 – 5:30pm

Room 1118, 11/F,

Yasumoto International Academic Park

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Tim Oakes is Professor of Geography and Director of the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. Currently he is Visiting Professor at the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences. His research focuses on China's dynamic cultural landscapes, with particular concern for different ways that governments harness symbolic culture and social life for economic development. The author of *Tourism and Modernity in China* (1998), he is also co-editor of numerous volumes, including *Making Cultural Cities in Asia: Mobility, Assemblage and the Politics of Aspirational Urbanism* (2016), *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State* (2010), and *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space* (2006). His articles appear in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, *China Quarterly*, *Modern China*, and *positions: asia critique* among others. In addition to his current appointment in Hong Kong, he has served as Visiting Professor at Wageningen University, Guizhou Minzu University, and University of Technology Sydney.

ABOUT THE TALK

This talk will explore the relationship between contemporary tourism practices and historical processes of peripheral territorialization in China. Approaching Guizhou as a late-imperial frontier region of state instability, contingent sovereignty, and ambiguous identities, I explore the ways historic projects to territorialize state power have come to be reconstituted through new practices of tourism development. The practices of ethnic, cultural, and heritage tourism in Guizhou, I argue, can be viewed as state 'projects of purification,' in which the chaos, indeterminacy and ambiguity of 'frontier' spaces, histories, and identities, are calcified into bordered and categorized commodities for tourist consumption. The analysis develops an interpretive framing of the Guizhou frontier as a paradoxical space in which two fundamental but irreconcilable impulses of nation-building meet in a productive but volatile tension: the search for primordial roots of national purity, on the one hand, and the missionary drive – usually divinely sanctioned – to improve, to civilize, and progress toward some destiny of ultimate redemption, on the other. Both of these impulses are readily apparent in the practices of tourism development in Guizhou today. The aporia between these impulses is fundamentally important, I argue, for understanding why state territorialization projects were, historically, incomplete, and why contemporary tourism can be understood as an ongoing process of peripheralization.



Free Admission

The seminar is conducted in English

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