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# Narrating Religion for Tourists: Tourist guidebooks' depictions of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in Xianggelila County, Yunnan.

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Located in recently renamed Xianggelila County in north-western Yunnan in the People's Republic of China, Ganden Sumtseling Monastery constitutes a highlight for any visiting tourist. Originally erected in 1679 to reflect the significance of Tibetan Buddhism in the region, it now contributes to the tourism-generated income earned by the County. Religion has become a factor in tourism: as motivation, as a resource or even as a concept to describe the practices of tourism itself (Graburn, 2001; Oakes and Sutton, 2010; Strausberg, 2011). The question posed in this paper asks how religion is narrated in travel literature. Specifically: what story does travel literature tell about religion at Ganden Sumtseling Monastery? In order to trace an answer to this question, this paper studies and compares the introductions contemporary Chinese and Western tourist guidebooks give to Ganden Sumtseling Monastery.

Despite their differing cultural contexts, the guidebooks display a number of similarities in their treatment of religion: both groups construct religion as an 'other' that generally fits (self-)orientalist images. Western guidebooks do this by stressing the mystical qualities of the monastery and the usage of unfamiliar, religious terms. The same language is used by Chinese guidebooks, which furthermore, by referencing history, turn religion into a thing of the past as opposed to the tourist's inherent modernity. In their instructions on how to engage religion, the guidebooks display different approaches: the Western guidebooks invite the tourist to remain a passive observer in order to not disturb local practitioners, while Chinese guidebooks encourage tourists to participate in religious rituals for good luck, or initiate conversations with local monks in order to satisfy their curiosity about local religious customs.

In both cases, religion becomes a commodity: to be engaged or purchased as the Chinese guidebooks suggest, and to be viewed and observed as their Western counterparts posit. Perhaps this approach constitutes a global constant in travel guidebooks' treatment of religion: religion must remain both available and purchasable for those seeking a religious experience, yet mystic and 'other' enough to satisfy tourism's inherent desire for otherness.

**Key Words:** tourist guidebooks, tourism in China, tourism and religion, religion in contemporary China

## Introduction

Located on the high-plateau of Xianggelila County in north-western Yunnan in the People's Republic of China, the recently restored Ganden Sumtseling Monastery<sup>[1]</sup> constitutes a main tourist attraction of the area. Originally erected in 1679 on behalf of the Tibetan Gelug School, it now contributes to the County's tourism-generated income. Along with its visual splendour, its religious significance is promoted as one of its main draws.

Long before the arrival of tourism and predating even the monastery's construction, Xianggelila County had been a site of warring influences, sometimes violent conflict and cultural exchange. Traders travelling on

this stretch of the Southern Silk Road known today as the Horse-Tea-Road - bringing tea to Tibet and horses to China - exchanged wares, ideas and stories. Nowadays, visitors, locals and migrants once again trade wares, ideas and stories, now under the auspices of tourism. After the renaming of the County from Zhongdian to Xianggelila - intentionally invoking the notion of Shangri-La as an oriental version of paradise

1. Ganden Sumtseling Monastery (噶丹·松赞林寺) is also known by the alternative name Guihua Si 归化寺. The majority of guidebooks utilize the former, often in its Chinese transliteration as Gadan Songzanlin with Si (寺 meaning temple or monastery) at times omitted. This paper uses a transliteration based on the Monastery's Tibetan name (དགའ་མཚན་སྒྲུབ་ཆེན་ལྷོ་, Wylie: dga' ldan sum rtse gling).

to generate interest - and due to the presence of the monastery located in this ostensibly remote region, religion<sup>[2]</sup> functions as a central part of the narratives encountered by tourists<sup>[3]</sup> (Kolås, 2004, 2007; Xiong and Yang, 2007).

Since the advent of mass tourism, cultural practices at tourism sites have been transformed and continue to be altered by technological advances, popular culture, economic interests and globalisation (MacCannell, 1976, 2001; Smith, 2001; Shepherd, 2002). Travel guidebooks, travelogues, novels, movies and online sources all construct narratives of these destinations, which in turn shape the way they are perceived. In his pivotal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978:202) remarked that travel guidebooks utilise orientalist depictions, and more recent research (Bhattacharyya, 1997; Epelde, 2004; Kraft, 2007) observes that orientalist patterns can be observed in contemporary guidebooks. However, Said's concept has faced critique too. The passivity of the oriental posited in Said's *Orientalism* has led scholars to turn their attention to the role of the oriental. Arif Dirlik (1996) positions Asians as active agents in the construction of orientalism, in a process described as self-orientalism. Studies have discerned forms of self- or new orientalism in the representation of China and the Chinese in Chinese media and advertisement (Mao, 2009) and in the representation of China's ethnic minorities (Schein, 1997). Grace Yan and Carla Santos (2009) point out instances of self-orientalism in Chinese tourism discourse, and Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (2011) looks at how self-orientalism effects religiosity in modern China.

In China, as elsewhere, religion figures in tourism: as motivation, as a resource, or as a concept to describe the practices of tourism itself (Graburn, 2001; Oakes and Sutton, 2010; Stausberg, 2011). Religion may also occupy a central place in guidebooks: religious places as sights, people engaged in religious practices or in

religious dress featured in photographs, or sections describing religions and their practices. Siv Ellen Kraft (2007) observed that *Lonely Planet India* differentiates between religion and spirituality, the former being linked to locals and the latter to the traveller. Bhattacharyya (1997:387) asserts that *Lonely Planet India* 'perpetuates the view of the Orient as spectacle' and religion composes a part of this spectacle. This begets the question whether other guidebooks utilise similar practices when dealing with China, and whether Western and Chinese guidebooks differ in their treatment of religion. To approach an answer, this paper looks at how a sample of six Chinese and six Western<sup>[4]</sup> guidebooks discuss religion when covering the site of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery.

This paper will begin with an introduction to Xianggelila County and Ganden Sumtseling Monastery. A brief discussion of travel guidebooks then leads to the analysis of Chinese and Western guidebooks. In this section the paper examines the entries on Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in the sampled guidebooks. The discussion looks at the findings more closely, and the conclusion presents the results in the form of a tentative hypothesis on how the travel guidebooks treat religion.

## Xianggelila County and Ganden Sumtseling Monastery

The idea of Shangri-La has, since its first appearance in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, evolved into a myth of popular culture (Eco, 2013). Zhongdian County in north-western Yunnan Province, China, renamed itself Xianggelila (Shangri-La) County in 2002, after a team of experts - hired by the County in 1996 - utilised geographical, etymological, and linguistic markers to demonstrate that the County matches Hilton's fictional conception (Yang, 2002; Huang, 2004). They presented a narrative<sup>[5]</sup> built on historical sources: from the Tang dynasty onward historical documents give the name of a former fortification of the Tubo Kingdom (676 - 679) as either Jiantang or Dakar Dzong (Yang, 2002, *Xianggelila shihua*, 25). However, after the Mu invaded nearby Lijiang in 1499 and seized control of the area Dakar Dzong's name merged with the name of another settlement resulting in 'Xianggenima' (ibid).

2. Religion in the context of tourism constitutes a vague and flexible term. Chinese-language guidebooks avoid the term and discuss 'minority cultures' and 'local festivals', invoke 'spiritual' atmosphere, 'sacred' spaces and appeal to their audience to complete specific actions 'for good luck'. Consequently the concept of religion hereafter follows the indistinct approach of the guidebooks and understands religion as set of varying practices aimed toward attaining metaphysical benefits.

3. This chapter uses the terms tourist, traveler and visitor interchangeably, since, in contrast to the academic discourse, the conceptual differentiation between these terms is not pronounced in commercial Chinese guidebooks.

4. Western constitutes an artificial category. Here it suggests itself as guidebooks are frequently translated in the EuroAmerican sphere, while translations of these materials into Chinese remain rare and translations of Chinese guidebooks into any Western language have not yet appeared.

Xianggenima phonetically resembles the Chinese transcription of Shangri-La: Xianggelila.

The history of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery begins in 1674, when the fifth Dalai Lama seized control of the area with the support of the Koshut Mongols and the Mu Kingdom. Subsequently, the then prominent Kagyu School of Buddhism was dissolved and their temples converted to the Dalai Lama's own Gelug School.<sup>[6]</sup> Local chronicles indicate that the Dalai Lama himself selected the location on which the first Gelug monastery of the region was to be built in 1679 (Jiedang, 1995). After the completion of the initial building - capable of housing 530 monks - the fifth Dalai Lama chose the name: Ganden, in reference to the first monastery established by Gelug School's founder Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), and Sumtseling, referencing the thirty-three heavens (ibid:105). Ganden Sumtseling Monastery continued to grow and by the dawn of the nineteenth century constituted the most important Gelug School monastery in Yunnan. In the meantime, it had expanded its capacity to house up to 1600 monks and was given another name by the Yongzheng Emperor: Guihua Si.

Jiedang (1995) writes that relations between the monastery and the Chinese state remained friendly after the Qinghai Revolution; the monastery supported passing troops in 1936. After the Chinese Communist Party's victory in 1949, the monastery - like other religious establishments in China - was required to become self-sufficient. Together with the surrounding settlements, Ganden Sumtseling Monastery followed the instructions given by the local CCP committee, and engaged primarily in agrarian production. According to Jiedang's account, the number of monks decreased during this time, which - in combination with a shortage of financial means - resulted in poor upkeep of the site. Like many religious buildings (Liu, 2005) Ganden Sumtseling Monastery incurred major damage during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Murals and paintings were destroyed and many of the

monastery's treasures were destroyed, stolen, or lost.

Local practitioners first initiated reconstruction in 1982, as religious life and monks returned to the building. Religious communities were initially required to be self-sufficient by the central government,<sup>[7]</sup> though the Chinese state began supporting the restoration of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in 1984. Some of the monastery's treasures that had been stolen, removed, or hidden during the Culture Revolution were restored. Tourism became relevant with the renaming of Zhongdian County into Shangri-La, and the development plans brought the financial means for further renovations and restoration work. Construction work conducted up to 2012 includes a visitor centre 2km down the road from the monastery housing a ticket office, restaurant, hotel and souvenir shop, as well as an environmentally friendly hiking trail around the lake in front of the monastery. Religious activity has also returned to the monastery. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution the number of monks at the monastery has risen: today roughly 700 monks live on or near the monastery grounds. Religious life today encompasses ritual chanting, festivals, debates on scriptures (Xinhua, 14.03.2009; Xinhua, 12.03.2009; Xinhua, 14.03.2011), and managing tourists.

At Ganden Sumtseling Monastery, signposts provide tourists with the names of individual buildings, dates of their construction, and sometimes the context of their construction or religious usage.

In general, the information provided tends to be concise and short - excepting a larger inscription next to the entrance gate, no in-depth information on the monastery's history and function can be found on site. On other buildings no information is provided.<sup>[8]</sup> Tourists perceive the monastery through their individual experience, which in turn, is shaped by prior knowledge of discourses on Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist Monasteries, etc., and the lens which signposts, tour guides, and guidebooks construct.

5. This narrative is considered an *invented tradition* (Hobsbawm, 1983) in the majority of Western guidebooks (*Lonely Planet China* 2012:677). At a glance the Chinese guidebooks sampled in this chapter reference Hilton's novel and the myth, but do not evaluate the authenticity of Xianggelila County's claim. Instead it could be suggested that they present the novel and the myth as a way for tourists to frame their visit, or a lens through which the visitor may view the place.

6. Today, the Gelug School is also known as the Gelugpa School or Sect (the word sect not being used pejoratively in Chinese discourses on religion) or as the Yellow Hat School.

7. Today, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are still required to be self-sufficient and encouraged to finance themselves through engaging in productive work (i.e. farming) or welcoming tourists (cf. Slobodnik, 2004). However, monasteries with state approval may also receive government funding to be administered through so-called Democratic Management Committees consisting of senior clergy, party members, and local government officials.

8. The observations date from September and October 2012.



Figure 1 : Chatreng Khamtsen Hall with a trilingual sign (2010)



Source : Author

## Guidebooks

Guidebooks serve multiple purposes: advertising the region to the potential visitor, providing practical information for the visit, and helping to understand what is / was being observed and experienced. Limited space and commercial interests shape their appearance and content. Tourists do not (usually) read guidebooks from cover to cover, therefore information must be provided in a way that is readily understandable. The guidebook essentially does two things: it presents a place as a tourist destination (Stausberg, 2011:200), and it mediates the destination to the audience (Bhattacharyya, 2007:373).

The current guidebook format first developed in Europe in the 1830s (Mackenzie, 2005): in the 19th century, mass transport had created opportunities to travel for a greater number of persons. Different from their predecessors - the European nobility that visited central Europe and later the Middle East on their Grand Tours in order to further their education and sophistication - these travellers had neither the years to complete a journey nor generous financial means (Kosher, 1998). The guidebook provided the information necessary to cut out expensive middle-men

and save time on travel. Nowadays, guidebooks like *Lonely Planet* aim to enable their readers to move independently by providing a combination of practical (i.e. transport, accommodation, local laws and customs) and meaning-making information (i.e. enumerating and explaining the significance of tourist sites, local history and customs). Guidebooks have diversified to address specific interests - guidebooks for pilgrims, guidebooks dedicated to specific regions, cities or places, guidebooks focused on languages or even guidebooks for locals (for example *Marco Polo Cityguide Berlin für Berliner* (2012)).<sup>[9]</sup> Torun Elsrud (2004) asserts that guidebooks show an inclination to utilise conservative and stereotypical images: the images and myths are expected to be familiar and understandable to the audience. Thus, the reproduction of stereotypical images of otherness explains the continued orientalist underpinnings observed by Kraft (2007) and Bhattacharyya (1997)

9. Guidebooks directed at a domestic or local audience, like the volumes dedicated to distant destinations, rely on the discourses and images about the destination which the publishers assume are familiar to their audience. As Bhattacharyya (1997:375) points out, guidebooks reveal more about the image of and the discourse about the destination conducted in their place of origin.

On the surface, guidebooks share observable similarities: they ‘combine maps, illustrations, sketches and text’ (Stausberg, 2011:200) and result from research conducted by numerous authors. Individual authors’ voices are usually not apparent in the guidebook itself; the apparent voice is authoritative and freely mixes facts and opinions (Kraft, 2007:233). In the Chinese guidebooks consulted, the individual contributors - usually a mixture of travel writers, freelance writers, journalists either local to the destination or from other parts of the country - fade further into the background as the books usually name committees plus one main editor as their author. While they may name the authors who contributed descriptions or photographs, this information does not allow reconstruction of which part of the guidebook was written by whom. .

Chinese guidebooks appear to be a relatively new phenomenon, though travel writing as a literary genre dates back to antiquity. Beyond the superficial similarity to their Western counterparts, Chinese guidebooks emerge from a tradition of travel by scholars, teachers, imperial clerks, diplomats, missionaries, monks, and pilgrims who produced a wide range of accounts. These ranged from dry, matter-of-fact chronicles of a journey to colourful descriptions of places, people and their practices. With the rise of leisure or recreational travel (Yan, 2010), Chinese literati travellers developed their own tradition of writing travel accounts and guidebooks. To meet demands of Confucian scholarship, literati framed their travel within the context of self-cultivation (Strassberg, 1994:39) or as contemplations on morals and ethics (Hargrett, 1975:85).<sup>[10]</sup> Similarly, visiting sites of historical events or related to the works of famous poets, historians or thinkers grew to be an important form of leisure travel. Over time these sites became known as *views*: a place observed from a specific vantage point or seen through the lens of particular literary or historical works (Teng, 2011; Strassberg, 1994). Hubei’s Red Cliff, the site of a historical battle in 208 AD constitutes one of these views: while the discussion on the battle’s exact location has continued for more than 1000 years, it also became a place to see. This viewing was instructed first by the surviving records of battle, and later by the famous Song Dynasty poet Su Shi’s (1037-1101) *Former Ode to the Red Cliff*.<sup>[11]</sup>

Compiled into gazettes and later into anthologies, the collected views created a form of guidebook. Information provided in these texts included allusions to the classics in order to legitimise views, and

references to widely known literary works established a context in which these sites were to be visited and viewed (Nyíri, 2003). This concept of views displays an interesting similarity to John Urry’s concept of the *tourist gaze* (1990): while resulting from different contexts, both establish a way of seeing that is specific to travellers. Both also show an inclination to reproduction: as contemporary tourists attempt to recreate the (presumed as authentic) pictures found in guidebooks, movies and similar advertisement materials, the Confucian leisure travellers concerned themselves with (re-)producing the correct view of their destination .

Nowadays, guidebooks in the People’s Republic appear as colourful and manifold as those sold in the West. Chinese publishers and editors produce numerous guidebooks sold throughout the PRC covering China and the world. While popular guidebooks are frequently translated from English into German, French, Italian or vice-versa, to my knowledge *Lonely Planet* presents the sole Western guidebook to have been translated into Chinese. The Chinese guidebooks largely resemble their Western counterparts: colourful pictures of places, people, objects and food, lists of places to see, information on how to get there, entrance fees, rules on behaviour, lists of restaurants and hotels, and general sections covering the destination region, its culture, history, and people. However, differences occur. For example, among the guidebooks examined for this paper, the Western guidebooks usually dedicate a section or chapter to Chinese or local religions and beliefs, while the Chinese guidebooks discuss religion in sections on history, minorities, traditions, or sites. As Chinese guidebooks do not cover religion in a separate chapter, in order to find out how they treat religion, this paper will look at their portrayal of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as a religious site. It will also study how Western guidebooks present the monastery, and through it, religion.

10. Other forms of travel writings include historiographical accounts or detailed descriptions of landscape, cities and inhabitants, or lyrical prose. The first type of writing was often compiled to be delivered to the emperor and used for strategic purposes: taxation, military campaigns, etc. The secondary type was commonly shared among travelling clerks or merchants, while the third type is at times also considered landscape literature and deals extensively with poetic place descriptions (Strassberg, 1994).

11. Today, Su’s poem has been inscribed into the rock at the site and a statue of him has been erected nearby.

## Sample

The following sample - six Chinese travel guidebooks and six Western guidebooks - have been selected according to the following criteria: (a) coverage of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery, (b) published recently, and (c) availability.

- a. Not all guidebooks provide information on Ganden Sumtseling Monastery. Small volumes in English and German usually do not mention the monastery at all. However, to my knowledge, all Chinese guidebooks on Yunnan at least mention the site.
- b. A surge in interest after completion of the reconstruction works in 2012 has resulted in wider coverage of the monastery in guidebooks. Earlier editions saw only short mentions (*Lonely Planet China*, 2010 for example) or did not cover the monastery at all.
- c. Availability here is understood as being commercially and easily purchasable, either in bookstores or online.

This section will proceed by sketching each guidebook's approach to Ganden Sumtseling Monastery, summarise the contents and provide a short, qualitative analysis. In the first part the focus will be on the Chinese travel guidebooks, before it shifts to the Western publications. The findings from the analysis will be summed up in the conclusion.

### *Chinese Travel Guidebooks*<sup>[12]</sup>

#### **(A) *Yunnan: Wanquan Zhenglüe* [Complete Strategy to [visit] Yunnan] (2013)**

This volume separates Yunnan into ten regions, and dedicates three subsections to each region: 'Landmarks', 'Hot Spots' and 'Restaurants & Snacks'. The entire book is in colour and only very few pages are without photographs. Guanxi Normal University Press publishes the guidebook as part of their *Koala Travel Series* which includes titles on other countries, China's provinces and cities, as well as guidebooks focusing on local cuisine (Beijing Snack Guide, Beijing Café Guide) or shopping (Hong Kong Shopping Guide). *Yunnan: Wanquan Zhenglüe* results from the work of 78 individual authors and researchers, and three editors.

Ganden Sumtseling is categorised under the subsection of Landmarks of Xianggelila County and discussed on one page. The top half of the page is covered by a

colour photograph under the monastery's name in Chinese and English. *Yunnan: Wanquan Zhenglüe* uses the English translation derived from the monastery's Sinicized name: *Songzanlin Monastery*. Another smaller photograph of the monastery's roof ornament sits below it, followed by a green information box titled 'How'. The box provides information on the entrance fee, how to get there, how to proceed ('clockwise'), and that 'you can light a butter lamp to wish for luck...' A text introducing and describing the monastery covers the remaining space of the page.

The introduction opens with a poetic description of arriving at the monastery. Implicitly adopting the perspective of a traveller, the guidebook speaks of leaving the town to the north. At the end of grassland plains the traveller finds Songzanlin Monastery sitting 'like an old castle' between two mountains. After this, the date of the monastery's construction is provided together with the information that it constitutes the largest monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in Yunnan. The following paragraph sketches layout, buildings styles and treasures (such as Thangka, butter lamps and sacred books). Many of the treasures, the guidebook states, were brought here by the fifth and seventh Dalai Lama; others are named for their value (golden and silver incense lamps, precious books). The text concludes by asserting that Songzanlin Monastery constitutes an important site of history and culture that attracts tourists from all directions.

*Yunnan: Wanquan Zhenglüe* directly mentions religion (Tibetan Buddhism) once and several times indirectly, by referencing the fifth and seventh Dalai Lama, objects of religious significance (i.e. Thangka), by reminding the visitor to proceed clockwise, and by suggesting to light butter lamps to wish for luck. Neither of the latter two practices is explicitly linked to Tibetan Buddhism - nor is Tibetan Buddhism discussed anywhere else in the entire book. The guidebook appears to exhort the visitor to proceed clockwise on its own authority. It relies on the audience to have sufficient background knowledge to understand the reason behind this instruction. Limited space or reliance on the audiences' knowledge may also have shaped the main paragraph listing important treasures. The worth of these objects is asserted by mentioning their material worth, antiquity or linking them to eminent historical persons. Their names make them obvious religious objects to a knowledgeable reader, but on a textual level the connection remains implicit. Religious objects appear as objects to be seen like exhibition pieces in a museum, or to be used to secure luck.

12. All quotes in this section have been translated from Chinese into English by the author.



The guidebook's treatment of the site allows at least two readings. The first, views Ganden Songzanlin Monastery as a place of historical and cultural value. The very last sentence '... an old, unique site of human culture...' expresses precisely this sentiment. Religion is tightly contained in objects that gain significance not by their religious qualities but by their historical value. References to the fifth and seventh Dalai Lama primarily assert cultural and historical significance, whereas the monks living at the site are never mentioned; the monastery serves as a museum. Except for the suggestion to light butter lamps, the place even appears free of any contemporary religious activity.

However, the implicit presence of religion throughout the text and the demand to adhere to religious practices simultaneously suggest a second reading. Ganden Songzanlin remains an active place of worship that is open to tourists. Tourists are welcome to not only observe its religious treasures, but also encouraged to participate in religious activities - whether for religious purposes or for a generalised idea of gaining good luck. The guidebook frames religion as an object available for tourist consumption,<sup>[13]</sup> and a way of experiencing a primarily historical place.

**(B) *Yunnan lüyou: Xianzai jiu kaishi* [Travel Yunnan: Start now] (2012)**

This book presents the joined efforts of 18 authors and one editor to introduce Yunnan to the potential visitor. The guidebook's content list appears after a 'how to use this book' and a 'highlights of Yunnan' page. An introductory reading section on the province's history, local specialties, climate, minorities' holidays and local dialect comes first. The section on the holidays of local minorities (19, 20) skirts around explicit mentions of religion: holidays are named as 'traditional holidays'. The different regions and cities of Yunnan are covered in chapters three to sixteen; chapter six presents Xianggelila County.

The page (177) on Ganden Sumtseling Monastery is split into four sections. The first section provides a general introduction to the monastery, the second practical information, the third suggests amusements

'not to be missed' and the last section contains 'tips'. *Yunnan lüyou: Xianzai jiu kaishi* accompanies the first section with the subtitle 'Little Potala' and establishes a link with the Potala Palace in Lhasa. A brief text sketches the construction and today's appearance of the monastery as well as the items to be found within. The following section titled 'info' provides practical information (entrance fee, transport, address and phone number), while the section on amusement suggests to ask the 'local and knowledgeable' monks for a guided tour. Having undergone rigid training to join the monastery, they are specialists and can give tourists 'a first understanding' of Tibetan Buddhism. Tourists are also encouraged to take part in two named religious celebrations, though the guidebook warns to take care in order to not offend. Recommendations on how to behave are covered in the 'tips' section: don't take pictures inside the buildings, do not point at images of Buddha, do not enter any building without asking, and listen to local monks. The tips section links these rules explicitly to Tibetan Buddhism.

*Yunnan lüyou: Xianzai jiu kaishi* constructs Ganden Sumtseling Monastery's relevance by invoking the Potala Palace in Lhasa as a point of reference. Guided by the idea that a reader may be familiar with the Potala Palace, the guidebook positions Ganden Sumtseling as its smaller counterpart and thereby also references Chinese images of Tibet. On the other hand, the guidebook implies that the readership is unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhism, and may rely on monks for 'a first understanding'. In this case the local monks occupy a double function: they act as guide and interpreter, explaining place, items and rituals to the visitors, but they are also part of the rituals and the place and as such constitute the local other.

In *Yunnan lüyou: Xianzai jiu kaishi* religious aspects feature prominently. Rules on tourist behaviour, suggested activities and local treasures are explicitly linked to Tibetan Buddhism. Tourists are assumed to be unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhism, but it is made accessible to them through local monks.

**(C) *Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe* [Strategy for [visiting] Kunming, Dali, Lijiang and Xianggelila] (2012)**

This guidebook exclusively covers the four places named, dedicating between four and six sections to each. The book credits five authors, one main editor and 15 photographers, and is published by China Travel Press. Several maps are inserted before the list of contents in the full-colour volume, after which the guidebook proceeds straight to introducing the sites.

13. Or possibly a commodity. Dean MacCannell coined the concept of *commodification of culture* in his 1976 monograph *The Tourist*. He postulates that tourism transforms cultural objects (material and immaterial) into commodities tourists may consume for a fee, whereby the objects lose their original significance. The idea has faced criticism, and in the case of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery it appears that objects retain their religious significance while simultaneously being available for tourist consumption.



Four chapters cover Xianggelila County: the first titled 'Special' deals with the County's natural sights, the second titled 'Ancient Site' [sic] lists Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as its second item. Chapters three and four cover local restaurants and guesthouses.

Two pages introduce the monastery (320–21). The English transcription given as 'Songzanlin Temple' follows underneath the Chinese title and then is followed by a subtitle: 'the tranquil place between the mountains'. Almost half of the two-page entry is taken up by a photograph of the main hall with its red columns and a monk in the background. Two smaller pictures on the opposite page show the outside façade of the main hall and the sutra hall. The section on the monastery (320) begins with an introductory text similar to *Yunnan: Wanquan Zhenglüe*: setting out from Xianggelila toward the north, one finds the monastery hidden between mountains and fields, looking like an old castle. Its golden roof tiles 'lighten the footsteps of every person'. After two sentences on the monastery's history (as a joint building project between the fifth Dalai Lama and the Kangxi Emperor), the book sketches out sights in the order a traveller might see them. It mentions the eight treasures of Buddhism, 108 pillars of the main hall, and numerous others religious objects. The guidebook also warns that some buildings may be off limits for women, though it does not say why. Two information boxes conclude the entry: the first box provides a description of what the monastery looks like from the distance and compares it to the Potala Palace, the second box titled 'How' provides practical information. Address, entrance fee, transport options and tips are given, including a reminder to proceed clockwise, do not touch anything, and be respectful to the monks. The guidebook also suggests to the potential visitor to light a lamp to pray for luck.

*Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe* frequently references religion in naming religious objects, speaking of the local monks and Tibetan Buddhism. At the same time the engagement remains superficial: except for the explanation concerning the 108 pillars, objects are named but not described. The most common descriptions laud these objects for being 'antique' or 'precious', or concentrate on the views. *Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe* shows an interesting preoccupation with views: from the narrative box describing how the monastery looks from afar, to the description of an approach, to describing the different views garnered within the monastery buildings or from the monastery back toward the plains. This harkens back to the Chinese conception of

canonical views, as well to the concept of the *tourist gaze*. The guidebook informs the tourist on how the monastery is to be seen, and by its descriptions promising beautiful vistas, inspires the potential visitor to attempt to reproduce these views. Another factor worth of note is the sentence 'Qing Emperor Kangxi gave the order to build [the monastery]'. While Qing support for the monastery is mentioned in several sources, the guidebook creates the impression the Qing built it while the fifth Dalai Lama merely picked the name. The statement references the contemporary Chinese discourse on Tibet regarding historical relations between the two entities, and it politicises the religious building.

Religion is present throughout the text and pictures in *Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe*, though not always pronounced. For example, the guidebook establishes no explicit link between some buildings being off limits to female visitors and Tibetan Buddhism. Neither is the section that suggests circumambulation and exhorts the visitor to act respectfully toward the monks linked to any religious practices. Religion here is embedded in a concern with views and history.

#### **(D) *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* [Complete Compass to Yunnan] (2012)**

*Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan*, published in 2012 by China Light Industry Press lists seven different authors. The guidebook dedicates one full-colour page to Ganden Sumtseling Monastery. One of three colour pictures is a map marking exits, entries, the parking lot and the buildings considered most important to tourists with their names (transcribed into Chinese). The other two pictures feature two of the main halls of the monastery. The information provided falls into four categories: general information on the monastery, practical travel information (including entrance prices, culinary and souvenir shopping recommendations), travel tips and a box providing information on a religious festival.

As with the other guidebooks, the introduction compares the monastery to a 'castle'. The book then names it as one of the Gelug School's most important sites of Tibetan Buddhism in Yunnan. It continues by stating that the monastery was named by the fifth Dalai Lama and then offers information on the size and the buildings found on the compound. *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* mentions features of the monastery's appearance: the golden roof tiles and the 108 red pillars in the main sutra hall. The number 108, the guidebook explains, is considered lucky in Buddhism. Paintings are described as 'satisfying the eye' and the

treasures kept as 'invaluable'. The paragraph concludes with a mention of Tibetan New Year celebrations held at the monastery.

The box below contains more detailed information on the festivals. While dates and activities may vary from monastery to monastery, the guidebook states that singing, dancing and music are central. Nearby Tibetans come to look and join and the book describes the atmosphere as 'solemn' and 'spiritual'. In another box on the margins, the guidebook recommends visitors buy a *khata* (a ceremonial scarf, usually made from white silk) and seek an audience with a monk: either to ask questions or to ask for a blessing. In Buddhism, the guidebook suggests, every plea is to be listened to and deserving of a satisfying answer. Quite interestingly, this implies that the tourist has the right to such an answer. The monks double function as mediators and part of the site; the guidebook concentrates on the services they may provide for tourists.

Religion constitutes a central part of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery according to *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* and it may be experienced through purchase or participation. As the descriptions of paintings and festivals imply, religion is solemn, yet also aesthetically pleasant: a spiritual spectacle. The locals and monks participating in religious rituals and festivals on site are part of it. In interactions with tourists they personify the monastery's continuing religious significance, but simultaneously represent an unmodern lifestyle compared to the tourists. *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* stresses the value of the treasures, extending their significance from the religious to the historical. The implied tourist is unfamiliar with Buddhism, though encouraged to engage it by asking for blessings or purchasing religious objects. To the tourists, Tibetan Buddhism posits an unfamiliar object available for consumption, though to the locals, religion is part of their everyday life.

**(E) *Yunnan Zizhuyou* [Independent travel to Yunnan] (2013)**

This text was published by Chemical Industry Press in 2013. The book credits an unnumbered and unnamed committee as authors, and after a short section featuring practical remarks and information (no information on local religions is provided), proceeds to introduce Yunnan's cities and counties. Ganden Sumtseling Monastery is listed among the sites of Xianggelila County and its presentation covers roughly 2/3s of one page (290). The guidebook provides a colour photograph of the monastery together with one

paragraph of text. After explaining the alternative names of the place, the guidebook lists the various buildings and a selection of the precious items stored within.

*Yunnan Zizhuyou* primarily concerns itself with the names given to the monastery. As various important personalities assigned these names - Ganden Sumtseling is connected to the fifth Dalai Lama and the Yongzheng Emperor coined Guihua Si - these serve to demonstrate the site's significance to the reader. Furthermore, referencing Potala Palace in Lhasa, the guidebook invokes images of Tibet and religious mysticism. Referencing the Yongzheng Emperor also posits the monastery as a Tibetan place in the national history of China. The guidebook frames the treasures kept at the monastery as 'historical treasures' and thereby further encourages the visitor to view the place through a historical lens. Still, religion features both explicitly - Tibetan Buddhism is named - and implicitly - through the photograph and naming of religious objects - in the guidebook.

On the whole, *Yunnan Zizhuyou* stresses the historical features of the site and does not assume an interest in experiencing religion among its implied readership. However, one passage describes the atmosphere of the place - 'sacred mountains and old temples' - and invokes a sense of mysticism and a distant past. Unlike in other Chinese guidebooks, religion is not represented as an object available for tourist consumption, but a mystic thing of the past.

**(F) *Lonely Planet Yunnan* (2014)**

This Volume follows the same structure as all *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, but credits a set of nine Chinese authors. Therefore, the work is no direct translation from its English counterpart. It differs from the aforementioned publications as it provides no photograph of the monastery. *Lonely Planet Yunnan* begins with a short introduction, references the Gelug School, and states that the fifth Dalai Lama himself chose the spot. A further paragraph explains the meaning of the name as it invokes the founder of the Gelug School and the thirty-three heavens of Buddhism. Afterward, the guidebook continues to introduce six different buildings by sketching out their function or the treasures to be viewed inside. The section concludes with a reminder to circumambulate, behave respectfully and not to disturb the monks unless the visitor wishes to participate in Buddhist practices.

Religion overlaps with historical and cultural significance in the presentation provided by *Lonely*

*Planet Yunnan*. It explicitly references the Gelug School and the fifth Dalai Lama and explains the religious function of some buildings. In its instructions to the visitor, the guidebook emphasizes respecting local customs and not causing a disturbance. The guidebook suggests that the monks may help a tourist with information on Buddhism, but refrains from creating an expectation that they will do so.

*Lonely Planet Yunnan*'s intended visitor possesses either a pronounced interest in religion, or remains distanced, avoids creating a disturbance, and is content to be an onlooker. This depiction puts religious practices of worshippers and the presence of tourists at odds with each other: the guidebook implies that tourists and their practices disturb religious practices. *Lonely Planet Yunnan* also mentions that even though a part of the entrance fee is used to for the monastery's upkeep and to support the neighbouring communities, it is still high. It seems that to the guidebook the monastery ideally would be visited free of charge or for a donation. To the guidebook, stripping away the purchase of an entrance ticket would make visiting the monastery less of a commercial activity. Taken to its conclusion, the text apparently desires a divorce of religious from commercial activities.

Religion in *Lonely Planet Yunnan* is presented in a historical context, but it is not a thing of the past as the presence of monks shows. Religion is alive, but at odds with commercial tourism, and the guidebooks exhorts the intended readership to protect this religious space from any disturbing influences - here by encouraging tourists to act as distanced observers and limit their interaction.

### **Western Travel Guidebooks**

#### **(A) *Lonely Planet China* (12th edition)**

This Volume has been compiled through the work of 11 authors. The guidebook discusses Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in one paragraph (675) and without photographs. Included in the concise text is the number of monks living on the side, the monastery's age, instructions on how to get there and a short discussion of the entrance price: '... a 150% jump in the ticket price in the last two years alone'. The guidebook also comments that 'extensive rebuilding ... has robbed the monastery of some of its charm ...', and continues to mention that the monastery constitutes one of the most important in southwest China. *Lonely Planet China* brings up Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in one other instance, when describing Zhongdian in general: 'Home to one of Yunnan's most rewarding monasteries, ...' (674).

Religion appears indirectly in this presentation: the presence of monks is indicated, though it does not mention Buddhism, instead calling it a 'Tibetan Monastery'. The intended reader is expected to understand this, and is similarly expected to be money-conscious. After the initial comment on the steep entrance fee, the paragraph closes with the tip that visitors arriving after 5pm may not be required to pay. *Lonely Planet China* herein implicitly disapproves of the monastery's engagement with commercialised tourism which includes the establishment of a restaurant and several souvenir shops during the monastery's renovation. This disapproval is even more obvious in the statement that the rebuilding 'robbed [it] of some of its charm'. Tourism here is framed as an intruder which destroys a place's charm and leads to commercialisation.

Another section of the guidebook is explicitly dedicated to religion. In the back of the book *Lonely Planet China*, 'Religion & Beliefs' are discussed in a seven-page chapter. In addition to Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam, the chapter also discusses Animism and Communism.<sup>[14]</sup> The short section on Buddhism provides some very general information on Buddhism and the Tibetan and Mongol forms, characterising them as 'mystical' (935). This results in an image of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as 'mystical' and 'charming (though less so than before)', and in turn the same descriptions may be applied to religion.

#### **(B) *Jim Goodman's Yunnan: China South of the Clouds* (2009)**

Jim Goodman's book differs from the common guidebook format. He begins by introducing history, cultural and natural highlights, then discusses historical and contemporary explorations. The sites are introduced in two sections, one titled 'Beaten Tracks', the other 'The Unfamiliar'. Under the heading of 'Beaten Tracks' the guidebook dedicates one and a half pages to the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery. The accompanying photograph is taken from an unusual perspective: the gaze is directed upward to the white-painted monastic settlement and the main hall with its gold-tiled roof remains hidden from view. The narrative makes no mention of the background of the monastery's construction, but states that the main

14. *Lonely Planet China* ignores the People's Republic of China's official policy that recognises five religions within China: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Other religions are commonly subsumed as sects or superstitions (folk religions) (Zhu, 2010).



buildings have recently been restored and that only the older monks live on the compound. The guidebook focuses on the recent and contemporary conditions at the monastery and indicates local and state involvement in renovation and upkeep. It continues to comment on the prevalence of the colour red and enumerate objects to be found in the buildings under the header 'religious paraphernalia' (373): *thangka* (Tibetan Buddhist paintings on fabric), statues of deities, *vajras* (weapon used as a ritual object, usually diamond-shaped), butter lamps, figurines and portraits of famous lamas. Goodman also describes the exterior as being covered with 'fresh, brightly painted religious imagery in the classical, fanciful Tibetan style'.

Rather interesting is Goodman's remark that one of the temples on the monastery's ground was sponsored by a king from the former Mu kingdom. While the Chinese guidebooks pointed toward the involvement of Qing Emperors, the Mu kingdom is not named in any other source examined here. Its mention here emphasises the monastery's exotic quality by connecting it to a relatively unknown kingdom, and simultaneously divorces it from Chinese influence. In this, Ganden Sumtseling Monastery differs from other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and becomes a unique site.

In general, this guidebook's narrative approach results in a rearrangement of information: practical information on transport and fees is relegated to the back of the book, while the locations are introduced in one continuous text. Religion appears frequently in the terms used, in the references to monks and descriptions of monastic life, and Tibetan Buddhism is mentioned in the book's first section. The reader can establish that the monastery is Tibetan Buddhist from the information provided, though Goodman does not explicitly state it. Despite the intended reader being a potential tourist, the text omits the tourist and tourism completely. Goodman does not comment on how or when the place may or should be visited. His descriptions create an image of the monastery consisting of a religious community without a trace of tourism.

**(C) David Leffman's *The Rough Guide to Southwest China* (2012)**

This *Rough Guide* has four sections: introduction, basics, guide, and context. It discusses Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in five sentences in the guide part of the book. Those five sentences cover the monastery's outward appearance, damages dealt in anti-Chinese uprisings in 1950, that 'it is said to be one of

the largest Tibetan monasteries in Yunnan', and objects to be found within the monastery. The use of negative adjectives when describing the main hall - 'claustrophobic, windowless' - and paintings - 'typically gruesome and colorful' - attract attention. The paragraph concludes with a reminder to the prospective visitor to circumambulate 'as in all Gelugpa-sect monasteries'.

The guidebook's approach to religion utilises descriptive markers that serve to inspire excitement in the reader. The designation 'typically gruesome and colorful' indicates a spectacle; the murals do not tell stories or serve as religious items, but to the tourist they provide entertainment. By adding the qualifier 'claustrophobic' the monastery becomes intimidating, and references to anti-Chinese uprisings invoke the Western discourse on Tibet and China. While this discourse frequently posits a peaceful Tibet against an aggressive China, Leffman's chosen descriptions result in stereotyping Tibetans as inclined to the 'gruesome and colorful' and 'claustrophobic', as well as unruly and potentially dangerous. In its section on Chinese beliefs, discussing Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism as well as Minority faiths and popular beliefs the guidebook offers further commentary on Tibetan Buddhism, providing the alternative name Lamaism and stating that the 'darker, fiercer iconography' (382) was bequeathed by the preceding Bon religion of Tibet. Leffman departs from the typical contemporary depictions of Tibet and instead frames Tibetans, their religion, and their religious sites as dangerous and foreign. His descriptions echo orientalist stereotypes and result in a fundamental othering of the place, its people, and its practices.

*The Rough Guide to Southwest China* constructs Ganden Sumtseling exclusively along these adjectives and in consequence, the monastery and its religion appear strange and foreign, almost hostile. Furthermore, the guidebook calls the Gelug School a 'sect' - a word with negative connotations in the Western world (Zhu 2010). Religion, to this guidebook, is a strange and threatening subject that creates meaning for the locals and spectacle for the foreign visitor.

**(D) Additional 'Western' Texts**

In addition to the three examples, a number of English and German guidebooks mention Ganden Sumtseling Monastery in passing. *Marco Polo China*, Polyglott's *China* and Dumont's *China: der Süden* each recommend the monastery in connection with visits to

either Xianggelila County or as an excursion from Lijiang. The sections covering the monastery rarely amount to more than three sentences, and in rare cases are accompanied by a photograph. Those commonly show the monastery's main halls and are taken from too far away to make out persons. Ganden Sumtseling Monastery is displayed as a space of religion and not so much of active religious practice in the form of practitioners. Similarly, the pictures do not show any tourists or signs of tourism such as the signboards or entrance gate, thus, rendering it invisible. These construct an image of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as a space simultaneously free of tourism and open to tourist consumption. The guidebooks ultimately frame religion - as seen through the monastery - as an object of the *tourist gaze*.

## Discussion

At a first glance, the Chinese and Western guidebooks display many similarities: they rely heavily on pictures, the implied readership is constituted as non-religious, and they reference contemporary images of and discourses on Tibet and religion. Naturally, the different discourses on Tibet and religion in China and the West produce different mediations of Ganden Sumtseling Monastery. The same or similar information framed in another context results in different understandings.

One of the remarkable differences lies in the emphasis the Chinese guidebooks put on the historical significance of the monastery and its treasures compared to their Western counterparts. Of the Chinese guidebooks examined, two (*Yunnan Zizhuyou* and *Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe*) point toward the Qing Emperor's involvement with the monastery's construction. In contrast, this is never mentioned in any of the Western guidebooks. However, *Yunnan South of the Clouds* points out the involvement of the Mu. No book - except *Lonely Planet China* in its chapter on Tibet - discusses Tibetan independence directly, but the discussion lingers in the background.

Several possible readings emerge: the books omitting the role played by the Qing emperors in the monastery's history may have simply done so to economise on space. In particular, the entries in the Western guidebooks are short, and this information may have been deemed unimportant. Yet, it could also have disturbed notions of the *Tibetanness* of the space: especially, since popular culture in the West tends to conjure an ahistorical, mystical Tibet (cf. McKay

1996). Alternatively, they may consider Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as outside the discourse on Tibet and Xianggelila County. Though the region was, and is, heavily influenced by Tibetan culture and politics, it lies outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Province.

The two Chinese guidebooks linking Ganden Sumtseling Monastery with Qing emperors establish a narrative that sees a longstanding cooperation between China and Tibet or even a paternal relationship: the monastery constitutes the Emperor's gift to the Dalai Lama who then chose the name (as suggested in *Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Xianggelila Zhenglüe*). Ganden Sumtseling Monastery, the fifth and seventh Dalai Lama, and the Potala Palace in Lhasa are all seen as part of China's national history. Ann Anagost (1997) has pointed out how viewing religious and cultural items through the lens of historic significance allows their inclusion into a national narrative. This strategy allows for continued religious practice within a communist context by framing it as safekeeping identity-shaping historical traditions.<sup>[15]</sup>

In general, the Western guidebooks pay less attention to the historical aspects of the monastery. Aside from the date of its construction, little information is given except for two notable instances. *The Rough Guide to Southwest China* speaks of the damages the monastery incurred during the uprisings in the 1950s. As analysed above, this constructs an image of a potentially dangerous and aggressive otherness in connection with Tibet. *Yunnan: South of the Clouds* informs its readers of the involvement of the Mu. This historical kingdom can be assumed to be unfamiliar to the intended readership, and its mention heightens the notion of unfamiliarity and otherness surrounding Ganden Sumtseling Monastery.

It appears that the historic aspects of the monastery may serve to stress the image of otherness in Western guidebooks, while in Chinese guidebooks they are framed by discourses on national identity and Tibet. However, the historical lens in Chinese guidebooks also contributes to othering: religion and its objects and practitioners are represented as things of the past. *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* assumes the tourist to be

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15. Communism and religion have been and remain uneasy bedfellows in contemporary China. All Buddhist monasteries need state approval and are run by boards consisting of senior clergy as well as party and administration members. In turn, religious institutions have been tasked with supporting a patriotic and communist education.

unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhism as to the modern tourist it is both foreign and outdated. The guidebook juxtaposes the modern, areligious visitor - who may choose to try out religious practices - against the monk clad in traditional clothes and living a life governed by historical practices. Furthermore, *Yunnan liyou: Xianzai jiu kaishi* warns the readership not to offend the monks and obey local rules on behaviour, and thereby implies that these rules will be unfamiliar to the modern tourist. While the guidebooks generally portray the lifestyles of monks and local minorities in a positive manner, viewed against the modernity of their intended audience, the local, the religion, and the practices are backward and other.

The Chinese guidebooks also utilise significantly more Buddhist terminology than their western counterparts. This may reflect a greater familiarity with the subject on part of the editors as well as their intended audience, or hint at how deep religious terminology has penetrated Chinese society. Yet, on the other hand, the guidebooks also explain the specific meanings ascribed to the numbers 108 and 33 in Buddhism, or speak of 'a first introduction to Tibetan Buddhism'. Of the Western guidebooks, only Goodman's *Yunnan: China South of the Clouds* lists various religious objects to be found in the monastery, though he adds explanations. Putting the foreign religious terms first, however, he stresses the otherness of these objects. The religious terminology in the Chinese guidebook may very well serve the same end: by using terms that are obviously foreign (*katha*, *thangka*, *vajra*) the sense of otherness is increased. Religious language becomes a symbol that signifies an exotic otherness.

Essentially, the image of Ganden Sumtseling as created in the Chinese guidebooks fits Said's concept of orientalism and Dirlik's proposed self-orientalism.<sup>[16]</sup> Behind the positive stereotypes and exotic otherness, lurk notions of backwardness. The Western guidebooks

share this trait when it comes to differentiating between the traveller and local. Furthermore, *The Rough Guide to Southwest China* describes murals on site as 'typically gruesome and colorful' and *Lonely Planet China* espouses Tibetan Buddhism as especially 'mystic'. The other is both mystical and spectacular - both orientalist themes in Western depictions of Tibet.

Western and Chinese guidebooks differ in their treatment of religion interacting with tourism. *Yunnan: South of the Clouds* entirely omits the traveller, *The Rough Guide* reminds the visitor to circumambulate as per religious custom and *Lonely Planet China* instructs the visitor not to disturb the monks. *Lonely Planet China* views the tourist as a potential disturbance, and the omission of tourism in *Yunnan: South of the Clouds* removes tourism from the religious space. On the other hand, a number of the Chinese titles explicitly solicit visitors to seek out monks, engage in religious rituals for good luck, or partake in religious festivities. At first glance, this stands in stark opposition to the Chinese Communist Party's policy on religion. However, the implied visitor in these guidebooks is constructed as a non-religious individual and in no danger of converting. Encouraging visitors to partake in rituals, may in this reading, constitute a form of 'dipping into spirituality' (cf. Kraft, 2007). Two guidebooks explicitly suggest that by lighting a butter lamp the visitor may pray for blessing for them and their family: this acknowledges that the tourist can engage religion and partake of religious boons.

Yet again, these interactions may be understood as transactions. Purchasing *khata*, lighting butter lamps or asking for blessings present ways for tourists to consume religion and simultaneously function as commercial activities. Monks function as guides for the tourists - *Yunnan Wanquan Zhinan* even considers them religiously obligated to provide satisfying answers. For the Chinese guidebooks, there is no stark contrast between commercialisation of sites and continuing religious practice. To one of the Western guidebooks, modernisation or development feel intrusive or wrong - *Lonely Planet China*'s assessment that the monastery was 'robbed of some of its charm' by reconstruction showcases that. The implication is that the guidebooks all transmit a certain expectation how religion at Ganden Sumtseling Monastery should look like: undisturbed by tourism and authentic according to the Western guidebooks, while available to the tourist in the Chinese guidebooks. In both cases, religion is kept at an arm's length and considered antithetical to the tourists' modernity.

16. In this case the line between orientalism and self-orientalism blurs. While the Chinese guidebooks are written by Chinese nationals about other Chinese nationals for Chinese nationals, the ethnic backgrounds of these groups differ. Essentially, the guidebooks address those Chinese nationals with the means to act as tourists (majorly of the Han ethnicity), are written by teams of ethnically mixed authors (as far as the books indicate), about Tibetans (or those that live on the site and present themselves as Tibetans). The practices surrounding representations of ethnic minorities in China often feature orientalism (cf. Oakes, 1998), though as members of said ethnic groups become involved in creating and promoting these representations they simultaneously become self-orientalist.



## Conclusion

To sum up the findings of this paper: the guidebooks examined construct religion as an other that generally fits (self-)orientalist images. Western guidebooks do this through stressing the mystical qualities of the monastery and the usage of unfamiliar, religious terms. The same language is used by Chinese guidebooks, which furthermore, by referencing history, turn religion into a thing of the past as opposed to the tourist's modernity. They present Ganden Sumtseling Monastery as a heritage site symbolising both the past and national identity.

Religion also posits a commodity: to be engaged or purchased as the Chinese guidebooks suggest, and to be viewed and observed, as their Western counterparts posit. Perhaps this approach constitutes a global constant in travel guidebooks' treatment of religion: religion must remain both available and purchasable for those seeking a religious experience, yet mystic and other enough to satisfy tourism's inherent desire for otherness. Both Western and Chinese guidebooks construct this image.

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