

# **Tourism as Catalyst of Economic and Political Change:**

## **The Case of Highland Minorities in Ladakh (India) and Northern Thailand**

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### **Foreword**

This article contrasts two situations empirically. It must be said that in both cases the differences between them are considerably greater than the similarities<sup>1</sup>. As far as economic growth in capitalist terms is concerned, both India and Thailand have made considerable progress, participating actively in the global economy as well as in the international tourist industry, where they have each benefited from their natural, historical and cultural advantages. Against this, the differences in demography and social complexity of these two contrasted regions cannot be compared in any serious way. Thus the comparisons to be drawn here are selective ones, solely in order to consider them in a larger perspective. In light of this, they should be viewed as useful analogies rather than an attempt to impose strict symmetries.

While references will be made to quite a number of authorities who have written peripherally about the subject, those invoked to support the main thrust of the argument - about the relationship linking tourism, state control, and the ethnic minorities in border regions - are far fewer. This may reflect the present state of knowledge of the social science in this area rather than any oversight on the writer's part. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to recognise that this conjunction of factors occurs along the edges of such established disciplines as frontier geography, Third World political economies, and the anthropology of

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1 The choice of these two locations came about as a result of research carried out on Ladakh between 1987-90 - where I had previously worked on several occasions as a tourist guide - and in Thailand since 1989 when I began working on my Ph.D.

tourism, which so far it has rarely seemed necessary to correlate to each other.

Having recognised this, we should also note that obviously it is far too early to think of drawing any conclusions on the subject, which is not the aim here.

## **Introduction**

In Northwestern India as well as in Northern Thailand, the consequences of two distinct patterns of setting national boundaries are visible, each superimposed on the other. One is the so-called modern nation-state exerting political control over a territory with fixed and delineated frontiers, inherited from colonial days but also from the centuries of regional strife between competing kingdoms and empires. The other, an equally ancient pattern, though more diffused, is based on centuries long customary rights and long forged self representations of cultural identity, on the grounds of which local populations, often national minorities, claim the right to recognised privileges. Still, modern frontier lines have generally been fixed using somewhat abstract criteria, such as a watershed, a cease-fire line, or even an unsurveyed line drawn on a map - often fuzzy when running through badlands - all lines in territory that is preferably remote from the national capitals and the resource and population concentrations of the nations concerned. Whatever the initial conditions that led to their being drawn in this manner, such border lines all too frequently slice through mountainous regions where ethnic minorities have long traditions of living, trading and moving around (Lim 1984).

The two highland groups considered in this article fall within such categories. The Ladakhi minority in Northwest India used to live along and trade across the Himalayan frontier lines later hermetically fixed by the cease-fire that concluded the first hostilities between India and Pakistan in 1949, and by the war between India and China over Aksai Chin in 1962. The highlanders of many ethnicities of Northern Thailand have populations that straddle the borders of China, Burma, Laos and Vietnam, and have been forced to stop their age old habit of nomadic shifting agriculture by national governments guarding those borders, although many are still arriving in Thailand as refugees, as a result of the not yet concluded geo-political struggles in Southeast Asia.



Despite their many differences, this common theme in both contexts has led to similar strategies of developments by the two states. In both cases, ethnic groups who until late into this century could move around their relative mountain ranges without let or hindrance now find their lives bounded and circumscribed by the imposition of international frontiers and confronted by governments concerned to impose limitations on their movements. To compensate for the economic costs of these restriction, new commercial activities have been implemented to provide for the basic needs in these remote areas. Of particular interest for this analysis is the growth of a modern tourist industry in both regions. This has resulted in the central governments, whether as a result of deliberate foresight or not, being offered an additional opportunity to extend their powers further into these previously isolated communities by means of increasing the minorities' dependency on the national economy, in turn precipitating fuller and irreversible integration with the national identity. The attempt is made here to demonstrate how ethnic and environmental tourism bring its specific contribution to this process.

### The Mechanism of the Tourist Industry and its Clientele

The necessary cause of tourism, as it has been defined here, appears to be a level of productivity sufficient to sustain leisure. If productivity is the key to tourism, then any analysis of touristic development without reference to productive centers that generate tourism needs and tourists is bound to be incomplete. Such metropolitan centers have varying degrees of control over the nature of tourism and its development, but they exercise it - at least at the beginning of their relationship with tourist areas - in alien regions. It is this power over touristic and related developments abroad that makes a metropolitan center imperialistic and tourism a form of imperialism. (Nash 1989:39)

In its linkage of the Core and the Periphery<sup>2</sup>, the international tourist industry is like any other capitalist service industry (Britton 1982; De Kadt 1979; Høivik & Heidberg 1980; Lanfant 1980; Nash 1989; Turner 1976).

The direct participants in international tourism form a symbiotic pair; the Central supplier of clients and the Peripheral region that has the amenities to satisfy this demand. The deal reflects the existing unequal

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2 Core and Periphery refers here to the language of political economy known as the World-System (Wallerstein, 1980).

economic relations between the two partners. The supplier sells a package tour to his customers and, as the more powerful dealer, is in a position to set the lowest possible price for the services provided by the smaller entrepreneur in the host country. Here the same process is repeated in turn by the agent in the capital with provincial subagents. Their duty is to make those local arrangements for the parties of tourists that the principal agent in the national capital is unable or unwilling to fix up himself. The provincial sub-agents may then repeat the same process at the local level. At each step, the larger party to the deal endeavours to keep prices down as low as possible, a standard business procedure. Other large organisations who are in a position to exact a levy on the flow of money generated by the trade are the airlines, the hotel chains, their suppliers, the advertising agencies (many of these services being provided by international companies originating from the countries of the Core) and the national bureaucracies who regulate the movements of the travellers. All of these entities thus benefit financially from the impulse that sets the tourist in motion until the moment he comes face to face with the actual individuals who supply in the field the services he requires during his visit. Obviously, only a very small percentage of the money paid for the package tour at the outset trickles down as far as this lowly level<sup>3</sup>.

Let us now take a closer look at the sort of tourists who find their way to the two designated regions under study here. In such isolated mountain ranges, as already noted, their remoteness, the hardy standards of transport and accommodation and the complete lack of luxurious amenities means that real hedonists never find their way into these regions. Visitors, then, are prepared to sacrifice creature comforts to their interest in the local peoples and their environments. Following the classification proposed by Valene Smith (1989), in both cases we are dealing with *ethnic tourism*, and what usually goes hand-in-hand with it, *environmental tourism*<sup>4</sup>. It is defined as *ethnic* because its practitioners strike off

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3 In the case of mass tourism, other participants than those mentioned here come into play, above all in the political sphere. But for the purposes of this essay, the schematic pattern used represents the international tourist industry adequately (Keller, 1985; Turner and Ash, 1975).

4 This typology was put forward in the first edition of *Host and Guests* in 1977. There are five types in all: ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, environmental tourism, and recreational tourism. Though somewhat basic, they are useful for classifying in a general manner the predominant *motivation* of tourists, above all those from industrialised states. What's more, in my opinion, they are far less rigid than the *comportmental* categories devised by Cohen (1979a). However, Smith's



the beaten track in search of sociologically exotic communities, which in the eyes of the traveller can lay claim to being "unique"; and *environmental* since the ecosystem visited - often utterly peculiar in the eyes of the visitor - constitutes an attraction of its own kind and is a community resource in which there is ample space for energetic activities which not everybody is up to. The travellers themselves tend to be young, reasonably intelligent and able and willing to exert themselves in the pursuit of experience and knowledge, from which they derive an emotional charge and vivid memories.

This should not be taken to mean, though, that only small numbers of tourists are involved. On the contrary, it is a matter of record that over the past twenty years the demand for such "adventure" tourism has been constantly rising, above all during the past few years when the promoters have learned to lard their advertisements with the fashionable liberal ideologies of today's explorers-to-be. Already in the past, in promoting such destinations, both local guides and the publicity machines of the international trade employed striking come-ons; little known - or totally unknown ... - tribes, mysterious religious rites, forgotten customs or ones so bizarre as to be beyond the pale of the civilized, trekking and camping in wild jungles, high mountains, or out in the desert, elephant riding, raft trips or white water runs, and so forth. Nowadays, fashionable new lures include the discovery of alien cultures - above all if they are on the slipway to oblivion - meaningful human encounters across cultural barriers, the experience of the primeval or of high emotions. A major topic is the flight from those places tainted by mass tourism, which these "adventure" tourism brokers present as degrading and despoiling all that it touches.

### Ladakh and Northern Thailand: State Strategies

Both Ladakh and Northern Thailand were early on included on the tourist promoters' lists of exotic destinations, actually both from the early 70s. The emphasis was on their ethnic and environmental qualities, underlying the distinctive characteristics of each region in their litera-

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categories could be improved upon by more precise definition especially as regards the differences between cultural tourism and ethnic tourism, two types which, in the field, prove difficult to disentangle. Robert Wood has suggested an interesting alternative solution (1984: 360-2).

ture<sup>5</sup>. For example, Ladakh is sold as an ancient caravan trail, a high desert valley enclosed by the natural barriers of the Himalayas. The population, largely of Tibetan culture, provides a unique opportunity to discover the mysterious world of Tibetan Lamaism uncorrupted by any Chinese influence. As for Northern Thailand, what is stressed is the labyrinth of mountains of medium elevation, mantled in wild tropical forests, in whose depths dwell hospitable and colourfully costumed tribal groups, and where mystery casts its shade across a clandestine harvest with an evocative name, the poppy of dreams, opium. The mythical Golden Triangle, beloved creation of the world's hack journalists and story makers, has undoubtedly endowed the region with a notoriety appealing to many.

Politically and economically the two regions are in fact peripheral tributaries of their regional capitals, Srinagar and Chiang Mai respectively, which control them administratively and in the development field on behalf of the central governments, in Delhi and Bangkok. As regions lacking any easily exploitable economic resources and traditionally occupied by subsistence agriculturalists, these border areas, from the state's viewpoint, must be kept populated. This policy has two aspects. Firstly, the governments wish to use these groups to serve important national interests; to maintain a population base in a contested border region in Ladakh's case, and to affirm control over frontier regions considered to be too permeable in that of Bangkok. Secondly, the authorities aim is also to prevent a troublesome and costly migration to more densely populated regions or to the outskirts of the towns where they would place additional strains on already inadequate infrastructures. Both regions have been outside the mainstream for many centuries and their ethnic minorities are often thought of and presented in the mass media as either suspect or a laughingstock (Baffie 1989; Kantowski and Sanders 1983).

The governments' attitudes are also not without their influence on this widespread distorted perception. The ethnic groups so typified in each case make up 1% or less of the total population of the two nations. Even supposing the concerned government had every real intention to deal with these minority populations with due respect for their cultural

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5 As for guidebooks written for "adventurous" tourists both for Ladakh and for Northern Thailand, among others, Lonely Planet (Australia) and *Le Guide du Routard* (France) are good examples. For a general analysis of French language guidebooks on Thailand, see Baffie (1988).



identities, to do so would actually be an undertaking beyond their financial means. In truth, financially, it would be beyond the abilities of a rich industrialised state to attempt this. Additionally, the two governments involved here have real problems over dependency on Core countries, with political corruption, plus - in different degrees - armed forces that continually are peering over the civil governments shoulders to check up on whether they are carrying out their duties in an "appropriate manner". In military minds, the challenge of tackling the complex tangle of inter-related problems posed by the control of these border lands is distilled into several unshakeable convictions embodied in no-nonsense, straightforward propositions that define the briefs of development projects: to maintain, if not increase the present population levels in these sensitive regions, preferably in sedentary, reliable settlements of a populace sharing a sense of national identity. To achieve this, an efficient strategy should either encourage and facilitate some controlled internal migration from the lowlands into the highlands, assimilate the highlands indigenous minority groups and leave them in place, or ideally, foster both<sup>6</sup>.

All local development programmes whether the government's own, or those from outside authorised by it to work in the region, incorporate these objectives from the outset and actively promote them. Employing rhetoric heavily laced with the concepts currently in vogue at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund - sustainable development, locally managed agriculture and marketing, consultation and villagers participation, and so forth - programmes are initiated by the state which in fact accelerate the sedentarisation of nomadic groups, obligate subsistence farmers to shift to cash-cropping (Mongkhol 1981 for example), introduce obligatory education in the national language - in India, Hindi/Urdu - induce the monetarisation of the local economy, lead to political proportional representation, and thus finally achieve economic, political and cultural subjugation, which is then carried further by the

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6 Numerous official documents and public interviews given by high ranking government officials and the military show clearly and without prevarication their explicit assimilationist goals. In Thailand's case, Bhruksasri (1989) has compiled a collection of extracts from official documents on this theme, while Abhamongkol (1980) kept repeating them in his doctoral thesis. In the case of India, documents of this nature are far more difficult to prise out of the ministries concerned (at least I had no success with it). The extensive zones under military control, above all along the borders, means that access to archives is often restricted for security reasons, and official documents addressing the issue seem to be extremely rare. All the same one can consult Patel (1984).

widespread introduction of the mass media that in all its forms promotes the values of the capital city.

### **Local Conditions for Tourism**

Tourism planning reflects wider realities of power in the society. If the government is authoritarian and structures of democratic input are lacking, if a small political elite is allied with comprador and foreign capital, if the ideology of development is capitalist, there are few grounds for expecting tourism planning and development to have different social consequences than other "development" policies. (Wood 1984:363)

When a government finds itself in a position to introduce tourist development activities, a scenario such as described above is generally already in operation under the rubric of a Master Plan for all future economic development within the region. In both cases under consideration here, to introduce this new element into the on-going operations, so that the government could "open" a village or a region to ethnic and environmental tourism, the additional administrative and infrastructural out-lays were minimal when compared with the investments required in other developmental fields or for mass tourism. Of course, though, some financial and other extra inputs were inevitable.

The major effort by the state concerns the crucial matter of accessibility. Providing adequate transportation facilities for residents, civil servants and local merchants is one thing; up-grading them to provide facilities considered suitable for foreign tourist is quite another. Ladakh had to wait for twenty-five years after Indian independence before Delhi and the army were confident that opening it up to unrestricted transit by civilians would not have any adverse effects on national security. From 1974, the military finally permitted private bus companies to begin a regular general service between Srinagar and Ladakh. Vigorous lobbying on the part of long-established Kashmiri merchants, old-hands at the tourist game since the time of the first Moghuls, played an important part in securing this relaxation of control. The army was in any case able to rely on the basic state of the infrastructure, geographical factors, and the harsh climate to keep low the inflow of visitors. The sole mountain highroad leading to Ladakh traverses many precipices, is subject to frequent landslides, and is closed by inclement weather from October to



May when the high passes are blocked by snow. Additionally, daily troop and military supply convoys are accorded top movement priority at all times when the route is open. The inauguration of airline passenger flights in 1979 made an increase in numbers possible but the tourist flow has remained stable for around twelve years now.

As for the north of Thailand, the question of accessibility is less complex. The whole region has always been open to outsiders except for at certain specific limited times and places. This has been due, for example, to intensive smuggling activities across the borders with Burma and Laos or armed insurgencies or intrusions (often linked to the former) at a very local level which has resulted in *ad hoc* closures of certain areas by the security forces until they have dealt with these localised outbreaks. Even now, such contingencies occasionally crop up but the rest of the north remains unaffected. New roads are still being bulldozed up to previously isolated highland villages, these roads supplement the more direct though often steep tracks which still remain in use by those highlanders preferring or having to walk.

How do "adventure" tourism relate to these circumstances? Such limitations in accessibility, which discourage investment in the usual type of holiday resort do provide, on the other hand, ideal circumstances for the promotion of ethnic and environmental tourism. To the point that the aspirations and dreams of the visitor can be accommodated by the host government in an economical strategy that allows it to pursue its objectives of maintaining or augmenting local population levels while increasing its control over the populace at very little extra cost.

For instance, this type of tourist wants to be in contact with the locals and enjoys sharing their means of transport - at least for the "adventure" stage of their itinerary - so they are willing to put up with the existing state of facilities. There is no road, so the only way in is on foot? No trekker worth his salt is going to let that deter him. What's more, a certain "risk" adds to the flavour of the exploit, always providing that the adventure does not run amok and the explorer come to regret the day he set out on the journey.

In fact, for the ethnic and environmental tourist an arduous journey through difficult terrain with political or bureaucratic obstacles to be circumvented en route adds to rather than detracts from the satisfaction to be derived from his discoveries, as well as serving as a guarantee of the

"authenticity"<sup>7</sup> of the ethnic minorities he has tracked down so assiduously, even if this has meant taking the longest way round by the hardest route to reach his goal (a manoeuvre which the guide who is solicitous for the fulfilment of his clients desires and pleasures would not be so churlish as to abstain from).<sup>8</sup>

### Tourism Related Economic Interactions in the Field

The tourist-local relationship is odd in many ways. One member is at play, one is at work; one has economic assets and little cultural knowledge [of the people he comes to visit], the other has cultural capital but little money. (Crick 1989: 331; my addition)

... both hosts and tourists have problems with accurately assessing people with whom they must deal but about whom they know very little. The fact that their assessments are inaccurate or possibly unrepresentative does not make the consequence any less real for them. (Farrell in Nash 1981: 466)

In northern Thailand villages, a visiting relative or friend is put up in the house of somebody belonging to the same lineage, or with close friendly relations to it. An occasional stranger is accommodated in the same way if he is prepared to accept the local norms. When a group of trekkers<sup>9</sup> arrives, however, their reception and night's accommodation cannot be fitted into the traditional patterns. Space is needed for around a dozen people and, often, to allow not only room for sleeping but for dining and relaxing together as well as facilities for ablutions for laundering clothes

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7 The concept of authenticity - in particular the notion of "staged authenticity" - has been at the centre of lively debate for nearly twenty years in the social science of tourism. Several contributions have been devoted to the topic, in particular since the landmark works of Dean MacCannell (1976) and of Victor Turner et al. (1978). Malcolm Crick (1989) published a good round-up of the views of the principle authors.

8 These observations on ethnic and environmental tourists were not covered in the typology proposed by Smith (1989). Here, as in the text that follows, I am drawing on my own personal experiences as a guide and as an observer in the field, and so obviously I accept responsibility for any irony of tone that may have crept into these passages ...

9 Here I am only considering the dynamics of group tourism. Generally there are from five up to fifteen members in such a band, and it is a privileged form of ethnic and environmental tourism.



and lavatories. All of this will require the construction of one or several adapted buildings.

To supervise communication between the villagers and the visitors is the task of the guide-cum-interpreter, the final linkman in the supply and demand chain. His responsibilities for the smooth running of the trek and the overnight stays means that he must attempt to satisfy the expectations of the villagers and his own employer, besides his clients themselves.

The guide and/or the agency will have chosen the villages according to several criteria; firstly, that it is a permanent site (obviously the tourist agency would not be too happy if their associates decamped without notice), secondly, depending on its relative difficulty of access, and thirdly, on account of its low level of economic development. These factors ensure the site's "authenticity", and in the last case give the agency the upperhand in its business dealings with the villagers.

More specifically, what the agency requires are villages where the inhabitants still wear traditional costumes, the buildings are made of customary local materials in the traditional style and manner, and where there is no electricity, tap water or any form of pecuniary harassment. Having found one, the travel agency's representative will then negotiate a deal with the village representative, generally the headman. The most usual outcome of these discussions is that the only real revenue the villagers will realise is from the accommodation charges and the opportunity to sell everyday utensils and other objects that are now promoted to the rank of handicrafts. Whether these are made in the village itself or bought in Chiang Mai to be resold for a small profit. The chance to sell food is rare since the guide will bring most of this in with him and cook it in ways his clients are familiar with. Left-overs are used for lunch the following day. The only real possibilities for money-making for the villagers are in supplying basic commodities such as tea, rice and firewood, though generally these are supplied free. As for employment, villagers may occasionally be hired as porters or as short term guides.

In Ladakh, the villages have been permanent settlements for centuries due to the exigencies of geography, the climate, the caravan trade and feudalism. There are far fewer villages than in highland Thailand and due to the marginal nature of the ecosystem they are located in the few places that permit agriculture, that is, along water courses and in valley bottoms. The tracks leading to them have long been in use for transporting merchandise, and these are the routes the trekkers will follow. In Ladakh, the tourist agency will draw up an itinerary rather than a

specific set of villages. In fact, what with the military restrictions and the difficulty of the terrain, the agency rarely has any alternative routes to choose from.

Growing crops in a rocky soil that has been laboriously irrigated results in low yields and any small surpluses have traditionally been bartered for other basic necessities. Here also, the agency ensures that the guide brings in all the food for the party and cooks it for them himself. Wood for cooking fires is not available here because of the lack of trees so he will also carry in a gas stove and some extra fuel. The absence of vegetation also poses problems in constructing supplementary accommodation for the groups of tourists - the local style is to build with dried mud bricks, but these are used with a wooden frame structure. Thus it often happens that visitors take shelter for the night in a stable, or in a field hut. Alternatively, trekkers can sleep in the open air - it scarcely ever rains so it is only necessary to be well-covered against the night's chill - and bath in the river, if they feel like it.

Given this, agencies can even operate tours in Ladakh without having any dealings at all with the villagers and frequently this is the case. The only way the village can then hope to derive any money from the passing visitors is by selling them such things as dried fruit or handicrafts, which again may be made in the village or bought from the nearby market town, Leh, for later resale to tourists. There are no opportunities for hired labour as porters or guides since the tracks are easy to follow and ponies or donkeys are used for portage.

In the two cases of Ladakh and Thailand, the direct economic cost for the hosting villagers is the time they spend, either waiting for the arrival of the visitors or when they have arrived, for the moment when one decides he wants some water, tea, fruit, alcohol, etc. In the context of a subsistence economy, the time thus spent instead of working in the fields is quite a large cost. Also, if it has been necessary to construct accommodation, these buildings must be regularly maintained<sup>10</sup>. In addition, villagers often lend extra blankets or provide supplementary food for free if the guide has lost some on route, or is short for whatever reason. And finally, there is the guide himself who has to be provided for, frequently meaning that he must be put up for free and given a percentage of the profits on their sales to the group. In fact, keeping the guide sweet is vital

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10 The villagers generally receive no financial contribution from the agency for the materials and their labours in building this accommodation for the visitors, nor for its maintenance.



if the flow of potential customers is to be maintained, and the price to be paid for this is proportional.

## **Discussion**

Given the pervasive indigenous demands for modernization, for the materialism and gadgetry that make human life physically more comfortable and easier, the labor-intensive tourist industry has progressively served as an economically viable and socially permissible vehicle to provide wage employment. (Smith 1989: x-xi)

The literature generally points out that tourism provides a considerable stimulus to the local and national economy, but it also results in an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth. Tourism thus seems to exacerbate existing cleavages within the community. (Greenwood 1989: 171)

As for the matter of indirect costs, as well as the long term social and political consequences which affect the cultural equilibrium of the villagers, this is clearly a complex issue with ramifications far beyond the simple financial cost/benefit analysis. As already emphasised, in both these cases the villagers linked to the ethnic and environmental tourist networks are located in peripheral border regions and subject to a high level of state intervention in the modern period. In general, such villages have also been involved for some years in governmental or non-governmental organisations' development projects. Let's consider briefly these local grounds where tourism comes to root itself.

In Thailand, if they have recently made the switch from shifting cultivation to farming in a settled location the subsequent consequences can be considerable. These may frequently include the impoverishment of the soil in their fields over several years, through leaching and erosion, the necessity thereafter of using chemical fertilizers plus herbicides and pesticides. To this must be added the inability to acquire new land since none remains unoccupied or unclaimed by the state, or due to lack of capital or proof of citizenship. All of this may be further compounded by a government policy of crop substitution whereby they are forbidden to grow a traditionally profitable though illegal crop, like the opium poppy, and required to plant instead new species for which it is theorised there will be a demand on regional, national and international markets. Thus

the villagers become the potential victims of poor planning by outsiders and subject to exterior forces over which they have no control.

As for Ladakh, all the development projects are naturally enough concerned with providing water and energy to the desert villages. Both are in short supply, especially the former. All kinds of water collecting techniques are being implemented as well as alternative energy experiments like methane gas, windmills of many designs and, of course, solar energy for cooking, and the latter are all needed since the winters are bitterly cold. In brief, everything is being done to produce more simply in the hopes of sustaining a steadily increasing populace - a completely new phenomenon regionally - which is already a goal that is pushing the limits of possibility of the local water courses and the land available that is suitable for farming. Added to this is the unfortunate combination of more mouths to feed in each family, since the tradition of entering the monkhood no longer appeals to the young men (although the Indian army provides a significant alternative for young recruits), while at the same time state schooling prevents many children from working in the fields alongside their parents. To make ends meet, families must now find the means with which to buy provisions on the open market that they once produced for themselves or could acquire by barter, such as milk, salt, sugar, barley flour, fodder for their domestic animals and so forth. Without some rapid and adequate government response, an increase in the population exodus is foreseeable, a nascent movement already observable amongst the young. Should population decrease, agricultural production will decline, thus accelerating a cycle of misadaptations already tending towards irreversibility.

The cause of these difficulties that force the people to struggle for survival, the geographic factors, is precisely what provides a large part of the attraction for one of the few alternative economic options open: tourism. In both our cases, due to the low density of the populations and the absence of any large-scale industries, the opportunities for regular employment for unskilled work are too scarce to absorb the already available labours and the ones who would willingly decide to sell their labour-force. Thus, when harvests are bad, and the villagers are hard-pressed to get by, they are by necessity very receptive to any local employment opportunities that demand little capital and almost no training in new skills (a labour intensive situation, Smith 1989). The advent of tourism offers such a break.

Confronted with resource scarcity the choice for the villagers becomes plain. They can ultimately leave for an uncertain future elsewhere,



but wherever they go they are likely to feel exiled in a sea of alien others. Or they can stay and try to come to terms with the alternatives available, whether traditional or modern. The majority of the villagers observed for this study seem to plump for the second choice. Inertia allied to a fear of the unknown and the natural human reflex to wish to continue to live in the familiar circumstances of our childhood also probably make their contribution. They help to summon up the resolution to deal with the problems - often numerous - that confront anybody who is setting out on a new economic and social course of the sort described here. When all's said and done, if ethnic and environmental tourism brings only minimal financial returns to the villagers, as we tend to demonstrate, still all the same, what it does bring in helps to sustain the existing village scene. To take part in this new business seems sensible. To refuse to get involved when there are no visible alternatives would be an unaffordable luxury for many.

From the point of view of the central powers-that-be, as mentioned previously, sustaining a policy of investment in these peripheral regions that are seen as lacking any worthwhile natural resources in order to maintain a stable population level is highly costly, so much so that for some governments in comparable situations only the mandate of national security is felt to justify it. In India and Thailand, the funds poured into government development projects in our two regions are astronomical in comparison to the tiny number of direct beneficiaries, as also to the meagre results attained in terms of productivity. The two governments are technically and financially supported in their objectives by the participation of foreign and international development organisations, which helps head off domestic criticism of these huge and at first sight profitless investments. Seen in the perspective thus presented, and bearing in mind its modest scope, tourism does help to defray these expenses. Firstly, of course, whatever money it injects directly into the local economy has not come from the states own coffers. But beyond that, and this may be what really counts, it has effects, by means which are not readily quantifiable, that are extremely influential in the long run. Let us now examine these.

Having come this far, it should now be permissible to take as axiomatic the proposition that tourism is a force that contributes to the sedentarisation of populations new to this way of life in fixed settlements and which, moreover, helps accelerate the monetization of the village economy. Furthermore, as has been ably demonstrated by Theron Nuñez (1963), Davydd Greenwood (1989), and Robert Wood (1984), the pro-

motion of ethnic tourism provides governments with an unanticipated opportunity to intervene in the processes that direct cultural change by means of posing as the arbiter of the promotional image that is presented to foreign tourists of their very own *national* minority. At the local level, the combined effects of the above mentioned forces sets in motion a chain of events with distinct social and political consequences - and it is in that field that we propose to see the specific impact of tourism as an economic activity.

In both lineage societies (Thai highland groups) and feudal ones (Ladakh) by customary usage most political power is the acknowledged monopoly of the village elders. In this tradition, younger men can only hope to achieve a leader's role as they get older, till which time they must exercise great patience. Tourism inevitably disturbs this equilibrium<sup>11</sup>. The entrepreneurial possibilities which it offers to the villagers most strongly attracts those who have no immediate access to the family patrimony, those most ambitious to become wealthy, and, naturally enough, those who are keenest to get a grip on the local reins of power as soon as possible. The elders, on the contrary, tend to want to cling on to their present position of control, and most often, seem unaware of any possible medium and long term consequences of the social changes that are now underway.

After some time at this pace, some authors have demonstrated that some of the village youths have come to innovate in allying themselves economically with outsiders. The younger villagers easily come to have regular dealings with the intermediary levels of the tourist industry - guides, merchants, agents - and begin to use the lever of economic power they have just discovered to force the hand of the village elders and to introduce a new economic system to the village, one which was but recently alien to their circumstances, capitalism. In other words, the economic activities that are inherent in the development of the tourist industry foster the growth of competition over money, while the network of new contacts combined with business success inevitably brings a new-fangled style of politics in its train (in Thailand, Cohen 1979b; in Malaysia, Din 1988; in Ladakh, Michaud 1993).

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11 To clarify the point, any other economic activity offering comparable entrepreneurial opportunities could have similar affects. There is nothing unique about tourism as a generator of economic enterprise, although, perhaps, it is particularly suited for linking up isolated populations with few other economic resources.



Also, when tourism brings some economic success to a village, material changes are soon apparent. It naturally results in improved access to the local and national marketplace which in turn leads on to a steady improvement in transport infra-structure to facilitate the circulation of passengers and merchandise. If one is not already in existence, a road will in time be built to the village, which then both sees the arrival of many more outsiders and also the frequent journeys of villagers to discover something of the world at large from whence all these strangers keep arriving.

In what the villagers now decide to purchase given the improved access and their increased income, two stimuli understandably predominate; they buy what is useful and what confers prestige. Consequently, spurred on by a whole horde of pedlars and minor traders who seem to spring up out of the ground overnight to quickly bridge the gap between the village and the town - there may even be outsiders who set up shop in the village itself - soon a whole mass of bric-à-brac comes flowing into the community from the industrial world beyond their mountains in response to a real need or the desire to flaunt a status symbol<sup>12</sup>. As this ineluctable scenario is acted out, in the eyes of the tourist, the village's "cultural authenticity" is rapidly eroded by the influx of such "deplorable" signs of modernity, which invariably happens whether this comes about through tourism or any other kind of development.

What will the tourist agency do, seeing that the clients are no longer satisfied - and profits are declining proportionately - as modernization becomes the evident reality of the village? It will exercise its inalienable privilege and seek out another new "authentic" village, which, always provided the agency has managed to negotiate a lucrative deal for itself, will next season replace the original one which has now been despoiled of its "cultural purity".

What happens to such a "depleted" village is not difficult to guess. The respite now over, history takes up its course from where it left off.

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12 It should be noted that in the absence of the visual media, the groups of foreign trekkers and their guides from the outside world constitute incredibly powerful role models promoting the consumption of industrial goods. These privileged travellers by their manners, equipment and clothing are viewed as vivid heralds come to announce the advent of the modern paradise. Brief listing: designer boots, body-fitting rucksacks, sleeping babs and coats that are ultralight, nonflammable and waterproof, multipurpose flashlights, rustproof knives with multiple blades, fancy sunglasses, wristwatches, binoculars, cameras and video cameras, compact tape recorders, all gears in fluorescent colors that now make up the indispensable panoply of "adventure".

Having once before seen their earning capacities diminished, lacking sufficient land to cultivate or any other alternative means of employment, and provided that no other new alternative appears on the economic horizon, the fate that awaits the villagers now twice forced to the wall is that of economic exile for many of the family members who have to work to support their dependents. Without any new means of themselves being producers, they will be forced to move around in the towns in search of casual labour that is only sporadically available, according to the fluctuations in demand. They will become part of that easily exploitable mass of unskilled workers: construction workers and sweat shop recruits, today's equivalent of Zola's and Marx's coalminers and factory hands. Or perhaps, in the struggle to survive, the village disdained by the more pernickety trekkers may find a new role in the mass tourist market as a destination for daytrippers. To make a go of this it will need to have a suitably convenient location, to put up with crowds, to offer "handicrafts" in industrial quantities, and to come up with entertainments such as short elephant rides or firing on an archery range at five cents an arrow. It will also need luck to be able to establish itself as a destination on such a crowded and stiffly competitive market. In any case, even if they succeed in thus carving out a place for themselves, unless the tourist market is in an expanding phase, they will have edged out another village from its niche on the circuit and the result will be that other villagers in their turn will suffer the torments of trying to find some other way to eke out a miserable existence<sup>13</sup>.

### A Provisional Assessment and a Few Conjectures

So, in its final results, the development of ethnic and environmental tourism in the village such as has been described in this article, can be associated directly - without however being the sole cause - with 1) the physical dissolution of the traditional village community, with many if not all of the inhabitants having to leave and in time to be absorbed in the

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13 To describe with a cold precision this cycle of a society's life and death, the intelligentsia of tourist management circles have conceived an elegant euphemism: tourist area cycle of evolution (Butler 1980). It would appear, following this approach, that the application of a satisfactory technique of social engineering on the part of the concerned governmental authorities and the companies involved combined with a certain willingness on the part of the affected villagers, should suffice to ensure continued economic growth and avoid most chances of failure ...



national majority populace; or with 2) the survival of the original community, but through an almost complete mutation in its political, economic and cultural structures towards the dominant model, the market economy. In either case, the state with its double-pronged policy of exerting territorial control over lightly populated border zones and integrating national minorities with the majority populace - by means of controlling population movements, fostering fixed settlements, agricultural dependency and integration with the global economy, followed by acculturation along national lines - can find in tourism development a very efficient catalyst for the desired process. Furthermore, the tourist who visits these border zones is also likely to spend time in the capital, at the beaches and museums, while in his peregrinations making his contribution to the sustenance of an important national industry - now the largest source of foreign exchange in Thailand and one of the most important ones in India. For a government whose overall policy is to maximise national productivity through private enterprise, finding such a nationally lucrative business whose promotion helps it economise on its expensive commitment to protecting the national frontiers and integrating its minorities is a stroke of luck. Helping to buttress this case are the closely-reasoned arguments of Wood (1984), who demonstrates that tourist development is like a straight-forward case of business development in any field; whether it is examined in whole or in part, it displays the same components, the same tendencies and achieves the same kinds of results as any business whatsoever.

Does this tell the whole story, though? Is the government likely to derive nothing but political and economic profit from the expansion of ethnic and environmental tourism into these distant frontier zones? That would be to draw too hasty a conclusion on a dynamic social process whose long term results will certainly be complex. As far as these potential effects are concerned, however, certain presently visible trends seem to point the way. For instance, in the two situations described in this essay, the government's expectations are based on Rostow's (1960) concept of progress: from the development of a market economy depends the access to wealth, which in turn guarantees a material and social evolution in an irreversible linear progression towards modernity, a synonym for success. But this logic deliberately refuses to take into account that the appearance at the village level of new alliances and new rivalries as part of the growth of competitive capitalism, in the circumstances, has to be grafted onto an ancient but still flourishing social system. Given this, the forms that the resulting synthesis can assume vary enormously. In the

course of this new process, while learning the rules of the political and economic game being promoted and applied by the central government, while meanwhile for the first time having access to education, information and the national language, the more alert of the villagers also begin to recognise the signs of their self-identity crisis. They are capable also of distinguishing between a state of privilege and one of exploitation, a necessary precondition for political mobilisation - without being sufficient in itself of course. This train of events can also come about in the wake of other kinds of development besides tourism. But without doubt tourism can be included at the head of the list of factors that are capable of setting this process in motion, or at the very least of supporting its growth.

In fact, in the field, one possible consequence of the tourist development process at the village level is that which Joxe (1979), in analysing military power, called *contamination de classes* (class contamination). Tourism leads to individuals from different origins finding themselves exposed to each other, to social and political experiences that are both vivid and intense while being at the same time totally alien. There is no way any government can censor the dialogues that issue from these contexts. Not uncommonly, outsiders to these village communities, for example "engaged travellers" (Schwartz 1991), have made significant contributions not only to the growth of awareness about the inequality of a given situation, but also to the publication of these facts abroad and even to the setting up of indigenous local political organisations, or publications that aim to conserve indigenous traditions, thus resisting the government line of complete cultural integration. A growing number of studies of such cases (Altman 1988; Boissevain & Inglott 1979; Fisher 1990; McKean 1989; Manning 1979; Michaud 1991; Norberg-Hodge 1991) would seem to prove that it is entirely possible that the influx of tourists and the accompanying development can give rise to the growth of an awareness of the perils of modernity for the traditional patterns of self-identity. This in turn can lead on to the setting up of indigenous political groupings active on both the regional and national scene. For sure, none of this could have been foreseen in the initial stages of tourist development.

Such cases, specific and few if any followed up over the long term, have not as yet been analysed in depth. It is certainly necessary to continue along this, perhaps promising, path to discover whether tourist development carries other germs besides those of economic and cultural



assimilation which are intrinsic to the context of its production and diffusion; capitalism.

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