***Archetypes of Ethnicity: Architecture and Expectations in China’s Ethnic Tourism***

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**Abstract:**

When tourists complain that the sights and sites in a destination “all look the same,” what exactly does this mean? How is the tension between architectural uniformity (codified in building codes, regulations, and restrictions) reconciled with, or alongside, imaginations of otherness, difference, and distinction? How do these expectations write themselves onto bodies and landscapes in touristed places? This paper investigates the empirical and conceptual linkages between what is seen, what is shown, and what is experienced as these ideas and imaginaries are rendered visible in the materials, textures, and veneers of “ethnic architecture,” with an ethnographic focus on Chinese ethnic tourism.

I argue that, in China’s ethnic tourism development, tourism architecture results in the formation and reiteration of ethnic archetypes: idealized structures, forms, and classifications of “ways of being [and appearing] ethnic” (cf. Harrell 2001) that not only shape physical built environments but also social, lived relations. Geographers and anthropologists have repeatedly noted the political importance of village renovations, reconstruction, and resettlement as key parts of Chinese state efforts to promote rural economic development and maintain social stability (see Chio 2014, Oakes 2011, and Yeh 2013). Tourism development and cultural heritage preservation have thus become convenient justifications for these projects, and indeed, the observation that many villages, across ethnic groups and varied topographies, all look alike serves as confirmation that state programs, such as the campaign to “Build a New Socialist Countryside” launched in the the mid-2000s, have been successful. In my paper, I will analyze how ethnic identity has become “archetyped” in specific architectural forms meant to index touristic expectations and to simultaneously reinforce the strength of the central Chinese state. Architectural sameness thus operates as a politically-charged means of “neutralizing” undesirable socio-economic and cultural differences.

*Works Cited:*

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**Author Biography:**

Jenny Chio is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Emory University and Co-Editor of *Visual Anthropology Review*, the journal of the Society for Visual Anthropology. In 2016-2017, she is a Fellow at the Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies, University of Cologne. Her scholarship examines social transformations in rural China, with a critical focus on the politics of mobility, ethnic minority subjectivities, and vernacular media practices. She is the author of *A Landscape of Travel: The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China* (2014, University of Washington Press) and the director of *农家乐 Peasant Family Happiness* (2013, Berkeley Media), which won the 2014 David Plath Media Prize given by the Society of East Asian Anthropology.