

Scenic spot Europe: Chinese travellers on the Western periphery.

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Dean MacCannell started *The Tourist* — the first, and to this day the most influential, scholarly study of tourism — by stating that “‘the tourist’ is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general’ (MacCannell, 1976: 1). Indeed, both ‘the traveler’ and ‘the tourist’ — with different meanings — have long been important metaphors for the (post-)modern individual. But what these notions stand for both in this general metaphoric discourse and in the work of MacCannell — as well as the numerous students of tourism that came after him — is actually not ‘modern-man-in-general’ but an embodiment of modernity *in the West*, predicated on free market and liberal democracy. In most social studies of tourism — though they operate with universal theoretical claims — the non-Western subject can only be the ‘touree’ (tourism industry jargon for the ‘native object’ of tourism) that copes with the consequences of this product of Western modernity (Alneng, 2002). This equation between tourism and the West is striking when one goes through programmes of conferences on tourism, and it has influenced even much of the work produced by non-Western scholars (e.g. Yamashita, 2003).

Yet organized, commercialized mass tourism — a post-World War ii development now labeled the biggest business in the world, with revenues of \$463 billion in 2001 according to the World Tourism Organisation ([Wto](#)) — is spreading to vast populations that had not known it previously. This has potentially momentous consequences both for subjectivities in the societies in which tourism is emerging and for the countries that become exporters of leisure to newly mobile non-Western populations — whose ideas of leisure may be different from those in the West. Understanding the tourist practices of these populations may force us to revise our ideas of ‘modern-man-in-general’.

‘Expansion’ may be on Europe’s mind these days, yet both the increasingly powerless secularist welfare liberalisms of its Western half and the increasingly ethnocentric neoliberalisms in the East have become rather peripheral to global flows. This peripheralization has been caused to no small part by its reluctance to accept the flows of mobile non-Europeans who want to work, do business, study in, or simply gaze at it. I suggest that this reluctance has to do with Europe’s unwillingness to accept challenges to dominant navel-gazing representations of itself and its own

place in the world. Such foot-dragging, of course, contradicts the imperatives of the neoliberal economic regime. To mention only two corollaries of contemporary human mobility, education and leisure are two commodities whose share in Europe's exports are likely to eclipse more traditional ones. European states have been actively promoting both, courting in particular that proverbial goldmine of a new market, the People's Republic of China (Prc). Yet in China, there are strongly set, hegemonic discourses of what it means to be a tourist and what constitutes a tourist site, discourses in whose productions state practices have played a central role.

This article looks at the background to the emergence of large-scale Chinese tourism to Europe and at the views of modernity, travel, and Europe that will come with it to confront Europe's accepted representations of itself. The first part of the article discusses the link between international migration and modernity in contemporary Chinese public discourse and the images of Europe that have been produced in the context of 'new migrant literature'. The second part looks at the emergence of tourism and asks how the resulting contested representations may be changing the Chinese view of Europe.

It should be said that the analysis of Chinese publications presents a picture typical of the late 1990s, and it may well be different today. Also, the case material on Europe is not the result of systematic research but rather of serendipitous encounters. Thus, the reading I am presenting is intended to be evocative rather than conclusive. It is intended to stimulate a revision of our views on global mobility rather than to provide a verdict.

World cities, the 'new migrant', and Chinese modernity.

Since the Prc embarked on its modernization drive that since 1978 has become supreme state ideology and social mantra, Chinese citizens have been challenged to travel in multiple ways. As Liu (1997) has pointed out, a 'spatial hierarchy' arose, in which one's 'success' as a modern — or 'advanced' (*xianjin*, ??), 'civilized' (*wenming*, ??), 'cultured' (*you wenhua*, ???), 'high-quality' (*you suzhi*) — Chinese subject was linked to mobility. At the pinnacle of that hierarchy was international migration to the United States, the country that symbolized global modernity. Migration, only recently seen as treachery, was now reevaluated as an act of patriotic potential: 'successful' migrants could contribute not only to their own modernization and glory but also to that of the Fatherland (Nyíri 2001). Migrants are symbolic figures because they represent the vanguard of modernity, not only by virtue of their connection to more 'advanced' nations, but also by the very fact of their mobility.

From traitor to patriot: the ‘new migrant’ discourse.

From a state that only recently prevented foreign travel, China has become a state that encourages it but attempts to control its meaning. The public discourse in 1990s China, ranging from academics to the media, equated travel abroad with migration in pursuit of individual ‘development’ (*fazhan*, ??) through education or work, but ultimately and optimally through entrepreneurship. Indeed, the master narrative of the ‘new migrant’ is one of what Harvey (1989) termed ‘flexible accumulation’. The ‘new migrant’ — an official and media term usually applied to those who have left China since 1978 — is a figure symbolic of a new, globally modern and yet authentically national — even racial — way of being Chinese. He is successful in the global capitalist economy and rises to a position of economic and even political power in the country that epitomizes modernity and power, the United States, and yet he (or she) is able to do so precisely because of certain innate Chinese moral qualities, which include loyalty to the Chinese state (Nyíri, 2002b).

This image of the Chinese migrant stands in stark contrast to neo-Yellow Peril images of Chinese migration that circulate in mainstream European and Asian (and partly American) media, which frequently associate new migration from mainland China with illegality, crime and threats to economic security, demographic balance and/or public health (e.g. Lomanov, 2002). Nonetheless, it has had a powerful impact on the fashioning of migrant subjects, on the way migrants see themselves and their various environments, their relationship to China and the countries they reside in, and in the way they justify their choices and actions (Nyíri, 2002a, b). This is because ‘new migrant’ imagery carried by a burgeoning global Chinese media with an increasingly overlapping content increasingly replaced locally constructed media discourses in their living rooms (Nyíri forthcoming). Media that increasingly adopt this discourse include the satellite channel of China Central Television, private channels with business interests in mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as newspapers published by Hong Kong concerns and new migrants (see Yang 1997, Zhang 2001a, Nyíri 2002b, and Parker 2003)¹.

Global cities and Chinese modernity.

The overseas Chinese have played central roles in Chinese discourses of a national culture several times in the country’s modern history (see e.g. Duara, 1997). Today again, the economic success of overseas Chinese and, in particular, ‘new migrants’ plays a central role in assertions of cultural nationalism. As Rojek and Urry point out, the touristic creation of a ‘national culture’ may

involve sites across national borders, and this is necessarily the case for diasporic (or transnational) populations (Rojek and Urry, 1997: 12). For China today, global cities of the West increasingly acquire the meaning of such national sites as they come to signify migrant success in a plethora of films, television dramas, and fiction. Beginning with the hugely successful soap opera based on the 1991 novel *A Peking Man in New York*, migrants in these accounts play the roles of both scouts and voyeurs for the nation, providing a continuous peep show accompanied by a commentary on foreign localities as backdrops for evolving ways of Chinese life (Sun, 2002: 67-111). In these books and films, Tokyo, Moscow, Paris and New York are above all sites of an unfolding global Chinese modernity. This function, as Wanning Sun observes, shapes the visual presentation of the cities through 'fetishistic uses of clichéd icons of speed, such as cars gliding noiselessly (and seemingly pollution-free) along the surface of highways; power-imposing bottom-up shots of city skylines; and energy, suggested by sweeping shots of multilevel highways' (Sun, 2002: 77).

Media reports and soap operas about and by 'new migrants', along with highly popular foreign (mainly American) television serials, are influential in shaping travelers' expectations of sites outside China, particularly since live reports with 'ordinary Westerners' or Western-made documentaries are rarely broadcast. Indeed, Sun (2002: 77) observes that Chinese arriving in Australia look for the signs of modernity familiar from films, and their lack 'can sometimes be as disappointing to Chinese arrivals in the "New World" as the experience of some Western tourists who arrive in some "Third World" place and fail to see signs of tradition — that is, "authenticity"'.

Europe: a new world.

In fact, in 'new migrant' literature, it is Europe, a less familiar migration destination, that is more commonly referred to as a 'new world' (*xin tiandi*, 新天地). Migrants arriving in Europe, too, look for the signs they have encountered in these soap operas and reports, but these signs are different from those described by Sun. *Into Europe* (*Zouru ouzhou*, 欧洲之旅), a 1999 soap opera produced by Southeast Fujian Television (based on A Hang's novel and directed by Chen Kemin), the episodes open with glamorous shots of Paris, Rome, or Budapest at night, but the daytime lives of migrants that viewers are invited to follow show a continent that is romantic but slow and lacking in modernity. The New Chinese Migrant embodied by the main hero of the series delivers that modernity. Having arrived in Paris penniless. Within a year, however, he reveals the plan of an ambitious new construction project to stunned and applauding Parisian audience. 'Ladies and gentlemen!' he announces, pointing to the scheme of a building complex with pagoda-style roofs.

'What will be different on the new map of Paris two years from now? The beautiful banks of the Seine will be full of Oriental splendour: the Chinatown Investment and Trade Centre!' (Nyíri, 2002b). The significance of the 'new Chinese' showing Paris — the symbolic centre of Europe — the road to modernity is obvious to any Chinese viewer brought up on narratives of how imperialist Europe has both humiliated China and forced it to modernize. The Chinese state looms large in the narrative of the film, produced and aired by state broadcasters: the Chinese embassy provides support for the protagonist's project, while funding for it is secured from China.

In series set in Eastern Europe, such as the tellingly named *Yellow Sun on the Danube's Banks* or *Goodbye, Moscow!*, there is less romance and more 'backwardness' (Nyíri, 2002b). But in all of these series, Europe emerges as a network of Chinatowns, markets selling Chinese goods, restaurants, and trade distribution routes. 'Foreigners' (or 'whities', [laowai, ??]) — police, tax officers, entrepreneurs, girlfriends, waiters, secretaries — and their casinos, parks, shopping malls, and swimming pools are not at the nodes of this map but in between them, like ethnic 'minority' dancers. In fact, the novel *Holy River* has Hungarian waiters clad in ethnic costume perform a dance for their Chinese boss (Nyíri, 2002b). Often, the New Migrant appears to have taken over the 'white man's burden' in spreading civilization through trade.

This view of Europe has been echoed by many migrants I have interviewed in the course of my work on migration in the 1990s and early 2000s. 'What's good about Europe is that it's quiet and there are few people. For the rest of it, Shanghai is better. It's more developed' — said Sun, a 28-year-old from Shanghai who worked as a waitress in Budapest. 'Italy doesn't have any nice places' — agreed her 20-year-old colleague, Yang, in Prato, Tuscany. Although they had not traveled extensively, their views of Europe were quite set: both ranked Paris as the best place. 'A bit more modern, almost like Shanghai' — conceded Sun. 'The most beautiful city. It's hygienic, and people are civilized' — suggested Yang. Asked what specifically was there to see in Paris, Wang, a 20-year-old who has lived in the Netherlands, Portugal, and Hungary, named 'the iron tower and Disneyland'. Asked to Eastern European countries, He, a 50-year-old trader in Budapest, noted that Budapest had the largest underground, while Sofia, Warsaw, and Belgrade did not have one at all (suggesting they were 'less developed'). Similarly, Luo, a factory worker in Treviso, Italy, was impressed with two things about Moscow: the underground and Red Square with Lenin's mausoleum.

Other migrants, generally those with more education and those who had spent more time in Europe, were more likely to appreciate the 'historic' or 'romantic' side of Europe despite its 'lack of development'. 'In Europe, if something is beautiful, everyone protects it' — noted Zhao, a

businesswoman in Budapest. 'Historical things are preserved, what's more, preserved in their original state.' 'Rome, even though it is so expensive, dirty and messy and it is so difficult to park, it has the most tangible spirit of history' — admitted Zhu, a businessman and former Party official living in Budapest.

Enter the tourist.

Into this map of Europe steps now the Chinese tourist. In 1990, the idea of traveling abroad in mainland China was synonymous with migration. Yet in the last ten years, thanks to rising incomes but also to policies that raised paid holidays from six days to three weeks and promoted 'leisure culture' as part of its ideology of modernization and 'civilization', leisure travel has increasingly become part of an upwardly mobile urban lifestyle. Yet unlike Western representations of tourism — which have been shaped by a number of post-Enlightenment, industrialization-era sensitivities of the sublimeness of nature, of positivist discovery, and of physical and spiritual self-bettering — tourism in China is understood by its managers and promoters squarely as a modern way of consumption whose objects are developed, bounded, approved and catalogued sites, 'scenic spots', each with an incontrovertible canon of cultural references (Figures 1, 2). Travel as verification of one's knowledge of an accepted canon of scenic spots has its root in pre-modern Chinese representations of gentry travel, but it has been appropriated by a tourism industry that the party-state continues to control through both management and indirect pedagogical practices (Nyíri, forthcoming). The canon of scenic spots reemerged in a postindustrial era in which the state exhorted its subjects to become modern citizens through consumption. Scenic spots now had the dual function of demonstrating cultural heritage and serving modernization and 'civilization'. As an official in Southwest China explained to sociologist Tim Oakes, villagers 'don't understand how to develop tourism... If they open their village by themselves it will be a mess... They'll have to wait for us to do it for them' (Oakes, 1998: 184). Scenic spots became 'themed', enclavic spaces, which were nonetheless far from purely ludic: they are not removed from but play an important role in the national body. The master cultural narrative of each spot is enacted in a standardized song-and-dance performance, which fulfils much the same function as the standard sets of views did in pre-modern times (perhaps best known in the West from the Japanese artist Hiroshige's series of views on the stations of the Tokaido).



Figure 1: The gate of a

scenic spot: the reconstructed ‘old town’ of the village of Zhujiajiao near Shanghai.



Figure 2: The Great Wall

and a Peking theme park in a 1998 encyclopedia of scenic spots, which follows the pattern of albums of imperial times.

The emergence of Chinese tourism.

The boom in domestic tourism – during one of the three weeklong holidays, between 1 and 7 October 2002, Chinese citizens purchased 90 million tickets to ‘scenic spots’² — has begun to translate into a changing understanding of foreign travel. Successive liberalizations have made it much easier to obtain passports, and though the procedure is still tortuous in most cases, it is waived in the case of group package tours. In 2002, the first countries outside of Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand — Germany, Egypt, Turkey, and Malta — were officially approved as destinations for such tours, followed by Cyprus and Hungary. The Approved Destination Status (Ads) meant that tourists to these countries were no longer required to masquerade as “delegations,” and that the real costs of joining such tours went down. Switzerland signed a memorandum of understanding with China in November 2003, followed by the European Union in February 2004, paving the way for the expansion of Ads to most of Europe. Yet, significantly, only organized groups, no individuals, can obtain tourist visas.

International travel has been picking up rapidly. According to official statistics, 20 million Prc citizens travelled abroad in 2003, up from 16 million in 2002, 12 million in 2001, and five million in 1997. While their number is still low compared to the size of China’s population — there are 11 million international travelers from much less populous Russia — the latest figure is double the number of overseas travelers from Japan. The pace of the growth — a yearly 20 to 30 per cent — has led the World Tourist Organisation (Wto) to estimate that in 2020, the number of Chinese tourists abroad will rise to 100 million, the highest of any country. Given that Chinese travelers are, in addition, decent spenders — according to Wto figures, they spent slightly more per capita than Koreans in 2000 — the growth forecast of Chinese tourism has become a mantra for the trade.

If the Wto estimates are at least tendentially correct, the emergence of overseas leisure travel from China heralds potentially enormous change in the ways receiving societies perceive processes of globalization. But it is obviously no less important in both reflecting and shaping how Chinese subjects perceive their place in global hierarchies of power, modernity, and consumption. As Craik (1997: 118) points out, ‘the cultural experiences offered by tourism are consumed in terms of prior knowledge, expectations, fantasies and mythologies generated in the tourist’s origin culture rather than by the cultural offerings of the destination’. Chinese tourists go abroad with the desire of modernity, but also with idea of scenic spots as developed entities and the related unambiguous files of cultural representations in their minds. How do tourists deal with the far less

canonized meanings of sites they encounter outside China? How will sources of authority be established over the interpretation of those sites? These questions are particularly important because of the central role of cross-border mobility in discourses of what it means to be Chinese in the modern world: indeed, one of the attractions of a trade fair in Kunming in 1999 was that visitors had their 'passports' stamped as if crossing the border (Tan, 2001: 13).

Scenic spot Europe.

Representations of foreign sites coming from soap operas and 'new migrant' reports probably have the greatest impact on tourist expectations. This is reinforced by the fact that most travel agents and guides who put together the itineraries of Chinese tour groups and accompany them are themselves recent Chinese migrants, in turn influenced by expectations towards tourist sites and guides in the Chinese domestic context. According to the head of 'citizens' overseas travel' at the China Travel Service's Hong Kong branch, the most popular European itineraries have been coach rides through ten or even twelve countries, but with the current 'legalization' of tourism, travel agencies are developing 'new products' with the help of 'product designers with many years' experience of life in Europe' (Shichang, 2004).

But competing representations are emerging. Chinese guidebooks and travelers' atlases of foreign countries first appeared in the 1990s. A survey of some of these³ reveals that their construction of tourist sites conforms to the scenic spot model. The spots are taken from the local tourist canon with an added ideological spin from Chinese official history-writing and presented, much like in the early guidebooks of Shanghai, they are presented serendipitously and with no geographic or historical connection between them. In London, 'the Greenwich meridian' and 'London fog' are represented side by side with the River Thames, Buckingham Palace, and Madame Tussaud's. In Berlin, the 'beautiful and sumptuous' former East German Palace of the Republic merits a description very similar to that of the Reichstag. (The Palace of the Republic, a 1980s building not even mentioned in the Michelin guide, has since been marked for demolition.) Humboldt University's importance is underlined by such historical personalities as Marx, Engels, Hegel, Einstein and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai. The reader is told when the Berlin Wall was erected and when it was demolished, but not by whom or why. In St. Petersburg, the cruiser *Aurora* and the Smolny Institute, both associated with Lenin and the official Soviet history of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, are two of only seven sights described. Inside the Smolny, 'three sacred places of the Revolution' are further identified: the congress hall, Lenin's study, and his living quarters. In Moscow, the Hotel Ukraine, a landmark Stalinist skyscraper, is compared to the

Notre Dame of Paris.

Unlike Western city guidebooks, these books present no walks, neighbourhoods or atmospheric descriptions, let alone 'off the beaten track' tips. On the other hand, next to the description of sights, which occupy only one-tenth to two-thirds of the guidebooks reviewed, the books have extensive chapters devoted to the history, economy, educational system, family life, marriage customs, etiquette, festivals, gambling and drinking habits of the countries described. Similar to the touristic representations of 'minorities' in China, festivals such as the German Mardi Gras are represented as activities in which all members of the nation participate. The prominence of gambling, drinking, and erotic entertainment — not mentioned in these guidebooks but, according to Chinese guides in Berlin, a standard item of the tourist itinerary — echoes early 20th-century representations of Shanghai.

These books may well now be obsolete, as a series of glossier, thicker guidebooks of European countries have appeared in China's bookshops in the 2000's. But the point is that the guidebooks, and even more so the narratives of local Chinese guides in Europe, communicate a motley assembly of 'views' in the tradition of pre-modern Chinese albums that carried on in a modified form into the twentieth century. The views made up a mixture of 'romantic' objects from the local tourist canon, objects representing modernity, and places significant for the migrants' map of the city. Rather than focusing on the details of history or architecture, the guides add in entertaining stories absent from the local tourist canon. During a cruise on the Danube in Budapest for a Chinese 'business delegation' in September 2001, the guide pointed out the following, in order: a casino popular with local Chinese; Castle Hill and the Chain Bridge ('symbols of Budapest'); Fishermen's Bastion; a floating restaurant; and Parliament. When talking about the Chain Bridge, the guide adds a story that is absent from Hungarian tourist lore and is probably false: that it is also called Heroes Bridge to honour thirty workers who died while it was bombed during World War II. In order to 'upgrade' the Millennial Monument in Heroes Square, or perhaps simply to connect it to some familiar symbol of Western modernity, the guide referred to the angel topping its column as the Goddess of Liberty, the Chinese name commonly applied to the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbour; a guide in Berlin did the same trick with the Victory Column.

Welcome to Pipal Avenue.

A participant in the Budapest cruise, a 29-year-old employee of a company in a township near Shanghai, did not quite know what to make of these sites: 'Western and Eastern views are different. In the East, the newer the better. Here, the older the better... The modern part is a bit

blander, but the historical is very strong. In the last two decades, there doesn't seem to have been much development...' Other tourists, however, do not hide their disappointment at the lack of 'modernity' and 'developed' sites, which they interpret as a lack of 'tourable' places. In 2001, Zhao, a Chinese tour guide in Berlin, admitted that most of her Chinese customers are 'a bit disappointed' at the lack of skyscrapers and broad avenues and find Berlin 'backward' compared to Shanghai or even Hangzhou — a point echoed by Meng, a young lecturer at one of Berlin's universities. 'Here the people are so proud of the KaDeWe, the big department store. But in China, a big restaurant can be larger than that.' According to Zhao, what attracts most interest apart from shopping and nightlife is places associated with historical personalities, such as the Marx-Engels monument, but also the site of Hitler's bunker. A Russian tour guide working with Chinese tourists in St. Petersburg echoed her, saying that what her groups want to see most are the Smolny and the *Aurora*. Apparently, tourists have files of representation attached to these sites that carry sufficient cultural references for their enshrinement.

The Chinese state is attempting to influence representations of foreign tourist sites. Remarkably, the first large-scale study of Internet filtering in China found tourism to other countries — along with Taiwan, Tibet, other political issues, religion, and health — to be one of the topics that the Chinese government regularly blocked Web information on.⁴ The various attempts to coin labels, to establish the categories according to which foreign sites should be ranked and compared to China, by migrant authors as well as by tourists, amount to attempts at wresting what Said called 'positional superiority' from the West, which has for centuries dictated those categories and defined views. Tourists and the mediators who convey the attractions to them reject, or more precisely do not engage with, locally dominant representations of the localities, for example the strongly historical representation of Berlin with Nazism and Communism at its centre. This lack of attention is linguistically manifested in the wanton misnaming (or renaming) of sites, often with English-sounding names — thus, the Berlin thoroughfare Unter den Linden becomes 'Pipal Avenue' and the Lüneburger Heide becomes 'Purple flower and sand plain' in the Germany guidebook — similar to the overwriting of Tibetan village names with Chinese names for scenic spots. But the categories that emerge in place of local representations are as yet unclear. The 'development'- and modernization-centred view of the cultural, which shapes the consumption of domestic scenic spots, is evidently insufficient to deal with experiences abroad, or at least in what might be called the Western periphery — neither the easy-to-label 'developing countries' nor the developmental paragon of North America. The Chinese tourist encounter with these sites is only beginning, and the production, dissemination and consumption of tourist canons will be a complex process, with multiple agendas and interpretations that have the potential to impact both Chinese

and non-Chinese views of being in the modern world.

One thing is for certain: the Chinese state, as long as it exists in its current form, will attempt to assert its cultural authority over foreign landscapes. Early in 2004, when PRC Chairman Hu Jintao visited Paris on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between his state and France, the Eiffel tower turned red and the Champs-Élysées closed for a 'dragon dance' parade. The centre of further festivities — to which Nobel Prize-winning Chinese writer, Gao Xingjian, who lives in Paris, was not invited — was EuroDisney, decorated in red and gold, the Chinese traditional/Communist colours. The *International Herald Tribune's* writer, and probably many Frenchmen and –women, were surprised at the 'national, government-sponsored campaign' that marked the first time the Eiffel Tower was ever lit in a single colour other than its normal golden glow and the first time since the German occupation for the Champs-Élysées to be occupied by a 'non-French event' (Smith, 2004). But for television audiences in China, the scene was familiar and the symbolism clear. Red lights, street parades, government-sponsored campaign — all these are a must for a successful tourism festival (Figure 3). Though a Nobel laureate, Gao Xingjian is a politically ambivalent figure almost unknown in China: the Eiffel Tower and EuroDisney, by contrast, are well-entrenched symbols of the West. For the duration of the celebrations, the vision of *Into Europe's* hero came true: Paris became a true and proper scenic spot with Chinese help.

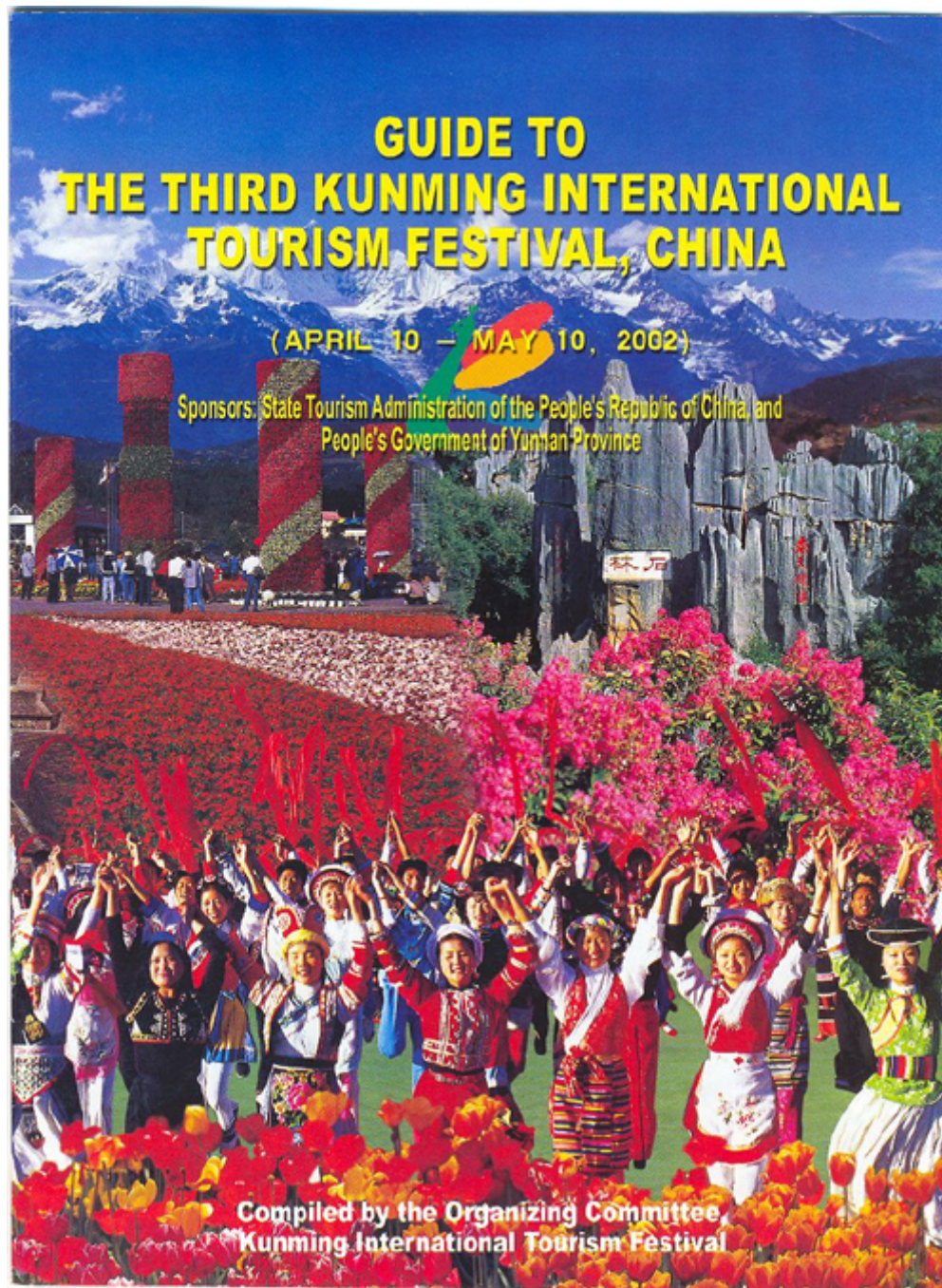


Figure 3: Promotional

booklet for China's largest tourism festival.

Figures 1, 2, et 3: © Pál Nyíri.