

5 Guests

Romance is a wish fulfilment or utopian fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden.
– Jameson (1981: 110)

In the summer of 2011, I spent an afternoon drinking tea with Hong and Xiao, the owners of the Cross from the South hostel. The couple named their hostel in remembrance of their time studying in New Zealand in their early twenties. In 2010, one year after graduating and returning to Beijing, they quit their jobs, moved to Lijiang, and got married at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. ‘It was amazing,’ Xiao told me about their wedding and the decision to move to Lijiang,

We wished for a 100% pure, exotic, and romantic wedding in New Zealand under the blue sky and snowy mountains. Lijiang makes our dream come true. Without pollution and heavy traffic like in Beijing, this is really a special and sacred place. The wedding was special for us. No family member came to our wedding as we had another two ceremonies in our hometown separately. But in Lijiang, a lot of new friends came. Our Naxi wedding, our new life, and our future – What an adventure!

In the previous chapters, I illustrated how Naxi heritage has been customized for the tourism industry. The integration of various Naxi traditions has facilitated the creation of a tourist destination, a place well suited to urban Chinese people in search of romance. While the first two chapters highlighted the transformation of Lijiang’s built environment and wedding rituals, the third chapter described the local actors’ roles in heritage making and tourism performance.

In the next two chapters, I will explore guests’ experiences at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard and their life in Lijiang more generally. Like Hong and Xiao, China’s modern consumer society allows the urban middle-class to move around the country in search of alternative lifestyles and employment. As part of their search for romance, many guests engage in romantic consumption through celebrating their actual wedding in the courtyard. They are couples who wish to experience ethnic weddings on their honeymoon trip, lifestyle migrants who would like to settle in Lijiang,

local Naxi interested in their own culture, and tourists who come solely for entertainment.

I call them 'guests,' because although some of them stay in Lijiang for many years, they all to a certain extent remain 'guests' in that context, not quite part of the original Naxi residential community. Indeed, the local actors of the courtyard regard many of the incoming travellers as guests. As the heritage manager, Mr. Liu, once told me, 'We would like to call them guests. We do not want to treat them as customers although this is a paid service. We hope our guests from different parts of the world can enjoy the wedding ceremonies that we provide.'

The Honeymooners, Vincent and Lulu

Many guests in the courtyard are honeymooners. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of young Chinese couples go on a honeymoon following their weddings at home, a practice that did not exist in traditional China. As in modern Western societies, Chinese people today use such a once-in-a-lifetime experience to celebrate their new marriage and to pursue individual happiness. A number of couples also take this opportunity to have their own wedding photos taken. Lijiang's setting – its ethnic context and natural landscape – has made it one of the most popular honeymoon destinations in China.

'Lijiang has always been my dream place for a wedding,' Lulu told me excitedly when we first met at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. This was on 5 December 2010, the day when Vincent and Lulu had their wedding ceremony as part of their honeymoon in China. Vincent is of Vietnamese origin and Lulu is from Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province in Southern China. As with most tourists who enjoy the services of the courtyard, they already had their official marriage ceremony in Guangzhou. But before starting their new life in Vietnam, they decided to experience another special wedding in Lijiang. While planning their honeymoon, they found the service of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard through websites and booked in advance. Lulu explained why:

I grew up in a traditional family in which I have to adhere to the path my parents have designed for me. They asked me to learn to play the piano when I was five years old. They expected me to study hard and go to a good university. They hoped that I would be able to find a good job in an international company after graduation. They also expected me to

find a good man to marry. There are so many expectations. I followed them and tried to be a good girl because I wanted them to be happy. [...] Now it is about my marriage. When Vincent and I had our wedding in Guangzhou, we felt so stressed. I think that the ceremony was more for my parents. We had to book a luxury hotel half a year in advance to host over 30 tables full of guests. We had to dress very formally, and to smile to numerous relatives whom we might not even have met before and would probably will never meet again in the future. It was really the most exhausting week I have ever had. I told myself that this was my last duty to my parents. After that, I will be on my own. I should enjoy my life and start my own family. Of course, I will still respect them, but in a different way.

I am lucky that Vincent understands me. He had the idea of arranging a special tourist wedding. So, we came here and booked the service. I love Lijiang because it is the most romantic place in China. This is exactly what we need: no more family burden, and nothing to be worried about. I feel relaxed here.

Young adults such as Lulu belong to a generation of only children.⁶² For this reason, their parents have high expectations, including the choice of their partners, their career development, and the style of their wedding. Many young Chinese end up feeling frustrated because of the continuous interference of their parents in the planning and preparation of their marriage. In the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, young couples are keen to have their own marriage and to celebrate it in a personal and memorable way. Many couples arrange a wedding ceremony that satisfies their romantic sensibilities of the place as an ideal and temporary escape from their family responsibilities. It reduces the stress one would experience in weddings at home.

Lulu showed a great interest in the wedding ceremony because she felt that the chanting of the Dongba can ‘cleanse’ her. After the Dongba completed the *suzu* ritual, she asked the moderator many questions about the meaning of the ritual, the Dongba religion, and its relation with Tibetan Buddhism. In the lantern ritual, the last stage of the wedding performance, Lulu was asked to place a lantern in the canal, a way to receive blessings of everlasting happiness and a new life. When performing this ritual, some grass in the canal blocked her lantern from moving. Without hesitation, Vincent jumped

62 China’s one-child family policy was announced in 1979 and developed as a response to the country’s rapid population growth. For a detail discussion on the social impacts of the policy, see Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005).

into the water and freed the lantern allowing it to smoothly float away. As he told me later: 'This is important – it is for our future.' Vincent did not really know that the lantern ritual stemmed from the Han tradition of worshipping ancestors. He fully believed that the lantern could bless their family as the moderator had told him.

Although the general public or the Dongba experts might regard the content of the Naxi wedding as inauthentic or just for fun, many of the couples are enthusiastic about this special form of wedding ceremony. They feel much more authentic and more able to freely express themselves than in their everyday life, because Lijiang and the courtyard offers them an opportunity to engage in non-everyday activities, a freedom which they lack at home (Wang 1999).

New Lijiang Residents, Wang and Yan

Many young Chinese tourists from big cities stay in Lijiang for long periods of time. They often open guesthouses, bars, or restaurants, and prefer to call themselves new Lijiang residents rather than tourists, who they increasingly distance themselves from. Some of the new resident couples even choose to get married in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. For them the decision goes beyond romance and freedom, and is primarily a ritual affirmation of their new identities as Lijiang residents. The exotic wedding ceremony separates the couple from their previous social networks and strengthens their relationship with other new residents with similar longing for romantic consumption.

Wang and Yan from the Blossom Hill Inn (*Huajiantang*) were one of these couples. Wang was from Zhejiang Province: he had worked in Shanghai as a hotel manager for about ten years after finishing his military service. In 2008, he and his sister quit their jobs, travelled around Yunnan, and then decided to stay in Lijiang. They opened a high-end luxury hotel named Blossom Hill Inn with the support from their friends. Wang explained why he chose to live in Lijiang:

I used to be a hotel manager in Shanghai. My work required me to stay at the hotel for quite a long time. Working overtime was normal for me; every day I felt very tired and so I started searching for a way out from that situation. This made me think: Why not leave Shanghai and have a long vacation? My sister had the same feeling and she joined me very soon. We left the city, brought our luggage and our dog, and drove all the way to Yunnan. We travelled

around Yunnan, saw many beautiful scenes, and had great experiences on the road. When we arrived at Lijiang, we suddenly fell in love with this Old Town because of its natural landscape and exotic atmosphere. I have to say, this is a magical place that can heal our souls. We felt peaceful and joyful here, so we decided to stay longer. Here we established the Blossom Hill Inn. We hope this place can become a spiritual home [*xinlin jiayuan*] for all visitors of Lijiang, a place to give people inner peace.

Like Wang and his sister, many guests complained about various aspects of their past: jobs, lifestyle, or relations with colleagues and family. They seek new ways of managing their life. Once they settle down in Lijiang, they use entrepreneurial talent to run their own business. An important goal of their journey is to obtain a better work–life balance, for instance, by being self-employed.

Yan used to live and work in Chongqing. In 2009, she visited Lijiang as a tourist and stayed in the Blossom Hill Inn. Wang volunteered to be her tour guide and they quickly fell in love during the journey. After Wang returned to Chongqing, they discussed their future. Half a year later, Yan decided to quit her job, moved to Lijiang, and began working at the Blossom Hill Inn as a manager. As she told me,

All my friends and relatives were surprised when they heard that I would leave Chongqing and move to Lijiang. I had been a consultant in an international training company for several years. This was really a decent job. I could earn more than 10,000 *yuan* per month at that time. My colleagues and supervisor were very nice to me and we were like a big family. They did not understand why I would quit such a job. Sometimes even I myself doubted my decision. Maybe it is because of the power of love? [laugh] It is not only because of Wang, but also because of this place. I think there is some kind of magic that makes me feel calm. [...] However, I got support from the younger generation of my family. They thought I was the pioneer that broke the rules, and I did something they also wanted to do but could not.

In November 2011, Wang and Yan chose to have their wedding in Lijiang. Since the Naxi Wedding Courtyard is located opposite the Blossom Hill Inn, the couple knew how the ceremonies were run and what to expect, so they decided to have a Naxi style wedding there. The couple planned how their ceremony would be structured and used the opportunity to strengthen and display their identity as new Lijiang residents.

While planning their wedding, Wang and Yan were able to revise the content of the wedding ceremony to meet their own tastes. For instance, instead of starting with a welcome ceremony at the entrance of the town and then a horse ride into the courtyard, they decided to stand at the entrance of the courtyard to welcome all the invited guests. They also thought the part of the ritual where the performer pretends to cry was too sad, so instead the bridesmaid sang a popular love song entitled ‘The Moon Represents My Heart (*Yueliang daibiao wodexin*).’ The couple hired singers from the local bars to perform as light entertainment. On the day, Wang was very happy with how the wedding arrangements came together:

I was grateful that officials from the Lijiang Heritage Bureau accepted my invitation and attended the wedding. I felt respected [*youmianzi*]. The ceremony was a lot of fun. Many guests joined the performance, singing and dancing together. We played a lot of games, but the speeches of the guests were more important. After the Dongba ritual, I invited guests to give a speech one by one: my sister, my parents, my old friends from Shanghai, our new friends in Lijiang, and the deputy director of the Heritage Bureau. This was an unforgettable and important experience for us.

Wang and Yan thought the *suzu* ritual was the most sacred part of the ceremony, even if they had not clearly understood its meaning. At the end of the ritual, they all cried. In a conversation with them after their wedding, the couple expressed their emotions during this part of the ceremony:

Yan: It was really impressive. I had seen the performance before, but when we were really embedded in the ritual, I could feel the sacredness of the chanting and the magical power entering my body. I believe the Dongba ritual will bless us and bind our souls together.

I: I saw you cry?

Yan: It is hard to say. I had a lot of emotions at that time, a mix of happiness, sadness, and hopes for my new life. It is like a transitional stage of our life, you know? Moving to Lijiang was not an easy decision, as my parents did not agree with it. However, after they attended our wedding, they gave us their blessings and showed their support. They sang and danced with us at the ceremony. I felt warm and liberated. This is really meaningful. The wedding is the start of our new life in Lijiang.

Wang and Yan came to Lijiang looking for a new home, one separated from the traditional bondages of family and kinship and more focused on the

spiritual binding of a small circle of friends sharing the same longing (Su 2012). They chose to marry in the courtyard not just for fun: with their friends as witnesses, the wedding demonstrated their determination to pursue freedom and self-realization. One month after the wedding, the couple went back to Yan's hometown to have another wedding ceremony. It was a ceremony especially devised for the bride's family, but it did not have the same level of significance for them as the one in the courtyard.

He Gang from Naxi Mama

The Naxi Wedding Courtyard ceremonies attracted a lot of Han Chinese customers, but only a few native Naxi residents in the Old Town are interested in the services they provided. While the older generation of Naxi in Lijiang might have some memories of traditional Naxi weddings, they are not interested in traditional ritual ceremonies from their past. This is largely because these older Naxi grew up in villages around Lijiang and were educated in modern schools where such traditions held no place. Many locals, especially people living in the New Town of Lijiang or in the surrounding villages, had not heard about the new wedding services. Others who had heard about the services dismissed them as tourist attractions that had little relation to Naxi traditions and culture. As Laohe, a retired Naxi public servant, told me: 'I was once invited to a banquet at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. In my opinion, there are no real Dongba in Lijiang anymore; these performances are only for tourists.' While researching the Naxi Wedding Courtyard from 2008 to 2013, I only saw a few Naxi couples getting married in the courtyard. He Gang, the new owner of the guesthouse Naxi Mama, was one of them.

Naxi Mama is one of the earliest guesthouses established in Lijiang (see Chapter 2). Although Naxi Mama today is not as prosperous as it had been in the early days, when tourism development for Western backpackers in the Old Town had just begun, it is still very popular with foreign tourists and backpackers. Having inherited the business from his mother, He Gang is interested in making friends with people from everywhere in the world. Each day and every night, the tourists hang out at the bar and restaurant area of the guesthouse, drinking beer and chatting with old or new friends. The business allows him to keep an open mind and learn new things from outside. Western backpackers are often curious about local Naxi traditions. He Gang has had to learn more about his own culture so he can respond to questions from outsiders, something that has become part of his everyday job.

In 2009, while organising his own wedding, He Gang noticed the service provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. As he told me,

I initially wanted to book the venue at our community centre in the Old Town. We normally hold our family events there. But then I thought of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard, an interesting place just ten minutes walk from my guesthouse. Several times I saw brides and grooms passing by my guesthouse with horses, white cranes, and music. Their wedding services attract many of my guests; they have dinner there and join in the wedding ceremony. I went there twice and found out the courtyard provides photographers and filmmakers. My wife and I believed that having our wedding there would be a fantastic experience, but, of course, we would not have the food they usually served. That's totally designed for tourists, so we planned to have our own cooks.

Another reason why He Gang chose to hold his wedding at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard was the cost. After negotiating with the manager of the courtyard, Mr. Liu, He Gang booked a full-package service for 2,000 *yuan* not including food. This is remarkably cheap for a wedding in Lijiang – a very simple wedding can cost as much as 10,000 *yuan*. He Gang arranged the banquet himself and hired eight chefs to prepare the food.

On the day of their wedding, He Gang and his wife dressed up in traditional Naxi-style clothes to welcome all the guests at the main entrance of the town. He Gang dressed in a white vest of yak leather, and his wife dressed in a light blue coat with laces on the collar and sleeves. The wedding party entered the courtyard accompanied by the Dongba and the band. The couple told all their friends and family members to dress in similar traditional-looking Naxi clothes to attend the ceremony, a practice that is atypical in Naxi weddings.⁶³

He Gang invited about 200 guests from his village. The main banquet took place at noon, while the dinner was reserved only to close relatives and friends. Since the courtyard could only host 20 tables at a time, the invited guests followed the principle of 'first come, first served' and many of his friends stood or sat beside the tables, precisely the usual way the Naxi

63 In recent years, the government has issued a policy that requires all staff members working in the tourism industry in Lijiang to wear Naxi clothes. This has boosted a huge market demand for Naxi-style traditional-looking clothes. Many local and provincial factories continue to produce various types of ethnic clothing. The designs include a mixture of dresses from different ethnic groups such as Naxi, Tibetans, Bai, or Pumi. Conversely, the fabric of He's bride's wedding gown was more colourful than Naxi wedding dresses in the early days.

people arrange their wedding banquets at home (see Chapter 3). He Gang also asked his family members to prepare and deliver dishes at tables. The eight chefs were assigned to cook traditional Naxi wedding dishes, rather than the food the courtyard usually serves to tourists.

The banquet lasted until the late afternoon. After the Dongba ritual, the singing and dancing began. A family from Paris staying at He Gang's guesthouse were also invited to the ceremony. Watching the owner of their guesthouse getting married, these tourists felt they were part of a very authentic Naxi wedding. Young Naxi guests, especially the children, from He Gang's village were happy with how the wedding was conducted; they joined in the performance and sang Naxi songs. However, most of the senior guests were not happy with the wedding. He Gang's grandmother complained,

This was a mess [*luanqibazao*]. It was quite different from how we Naxi get married. The dress of the bride looked weird. They also made a lot of mistakes in the ritual. The crying ritual was in a wrong rhythm. This part is supposed to happen at the bride's family, but now it is at the same place. The burning of the pine twigs was mistakenly used to expel the evil. [...] Anyway, it is their [her grandson's] wedding.

Most Naxi people in Lijiang follow a wedding tradition that has been influenced by the Han practice (Chapter 3). Especially to elder Naxi, the services provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard misrepresent the customs of the Naxi wedding, and thus lack authenticity. They regard it as a tourism commodity that does not actually belong to them. The story of He Gang's wedding is exceptional; because of his close affiliation with tourists, he was willing to try something outside of his traditional frame of reference. In 2011, when I went back to Lijiang, I met He Gang's wife and his one-year-old son at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard; the little boy danced and chased other guests around following the rhythm of the music.

Foreign Tourists, Marina and Johnson

Since 2011, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard has changed its strategy, offering shows and dinners rather than real weddings. In these shows, they invite a woman and a man among the guests to dress as bride and groom, and to perform all the wedding rituals. During the performance, the guests participate in games and dances while taking photographs. This change in

the wedding ritual transforms the previous theatrical performance into a participatory game. The guests, especially those who came to the courtyard primarily to enjoy the food and drink, welcomed the change. They regard the Dongba ritual as part of the entertainment, similar to performances they have seen in many other minority areas in China.

This kind of participatory game is very common in Chinese tourism destinations. For instance, in a few remote Miao villages in Guizhou Province, tour guides invite tourists to wear Miao costumes and join in some local events such as weddings and religious ceremonies to experience the ethnic culture, although these events are performances set up for tourists only. Similarly, Philip Xie (2011) has recorded that Han tourists participate in 'staged' ethnic weddings arranged by the ethnic Li minority in Hainan, an island located in the South China Sea. Some scholars have indicated that tourists indeed are indifferent as to whether the objects are real or false, similar to their experience during a visit to Disneyland (Marin 1984; Walsh 1992). A number of tourists, especially the elderly and the younger generation, appeared to be happy with the game. As a researcher on cultural heritage and ethnic tourism, I have observed and experienced such participatory games at different places in China.⁶⁴ During these events, I have always wondered whether authenticity in fact is of importance to these tourists.

One summer day in 2011, Marina and Johnson, from the United States, watched such a participatory wedding performance in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard. At the time, they were over 60 years old. They initially planned to just enjoy the dinner and watch the wedding performance as other tourists. However, since they were the only foreign couple attending the performance that day, the moderator, Mei, invited them to perform as the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony. At the beginning, both were very nervous. Johnson wore the groom's clothes under the guidance of the moderator. He touched the yak leather on the white vest with his hands and said: 'It is so

64 For instance, in 2007, I attended a conference organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in Sichuan Province. The participants of the conference were scholars of tourism studies and practitioners from tourism destinations in China. After the conference, the organizer led us to visit a Tibetan attraction for a short field trip. The Tibetan tour guide encouraged us to wear traditional Tibetan clothes and take photos as souvenirs. In the beginning, we felt funny and even ridiculous, as we all knew it was a game for tourists and outsiders. However, once we wore the costumes, we looked at each other, laughing and playing together. Under these circumstances, we communicated with each other in a more intimate way. This was not because we had a certain real or false experience, but because wearing an exotic costume made us establish an interpersonal relationship at that moment.

weird. [...] Why do I need to get married again after 30 years? In addition, there are no friends and family members here to witness this “wedding”!

After getting dressed, the crying ritual started in the middle of the courtyard. Two Naxi women poured water on Marina’s head and brushed her hair. In the meantime, an older Naxi woman stood behind Marina, singing the song ‘Marrying her Daughter’ in a sad tune. At the beginning, Marina looked curious about what was happening; however, when she heard the song, she became calm; tears started dwelling in her eyes. Johnson also became calm. Suddenly, the whole courtyard was shrouded in a heartfelt atmosphere of sadness. When the crying ritual finished, the Dongba led the couple to the chapel where the rest of the ceremony was carried out. They were asked to kneel down in front of the sacred altar. The Dongba started to conduct the *suzu* ritual, burning incense, chanting, and blessing. He used a red string to bind Johnson and Marina’s hands, and put butter oil on their foreheads. During the ritual, they closed their eyes and listened to the sacred chanting.

Marina told me later that the ritual touched her and brought back some of her deepest memories. She later described:

The song was beautiful, amazingly beautiful! It absolutely touched me. I remembered that my mother did not show up at my wedding. None of my female family members took care of me at that time. [...] The Dongba ritual had a kind of magical power. We both were totally taken in the sacred moment of the ceremony.

After the wedding ritual, Fuhua came to our table and said he was very excited to meet the couple. He told Marina that he felt this was a very effective ritual: ‘Many tourists come to the courtyard only for fun. But I can feel that you love each other, and both of you were deeply embedded in the ritual. I believe the god Su will protect your family.’

I had never seen Fuhua directly expressing his opinion about the ritual to his guests. He was apparently moved by Marina and Johnson’s participation. After the wedding service, he invited us to his bedroom on the second floor of the courtyard. The room setting was very simple – a single bed, a desk with a number of books, scriptures, and some personal belongings. Marina and Jonson felt flattered to see the backstage of the show, especially the personal space of the Dongba. Here the backstage became part of the front stage as Fuhua performed his identity as a Dongba in another way. He proudly showed us the scriptures he used in the ritual performance and excerpts from a project he was working on. He told us that ‘the Dongba

Culture Research Institute wants to translate some Dongba classic books into Chinese, but they lack expertise, so they invited me to do it. They do not offer a lot of money, but I still feel I should work on it.'

Fuhua kept talking about his low salary, the difficulty of conservation work, and how precious Dongba culture is. In the end, he offered Marina a manuscript scroll he drew for the Nature Conservancy, an international NGO dedicated to the conservation of natural resources. Marina happily accepted the gift and, in return, the couple gave Fuhua 200 *yuan* as a tip. Chinese tourists do not usually give tips. Fuhua seemed very happy and deeply encouraged. After the couple left, he told me: 'I think that they are really in love with our culture and I can feel it.'

Marina and Jonson's experience illustrates that the performance may also lead to a very personal and emotional response. During the performance, whether the scripture or the dance is authentic or not is no longer of great importance. When the water was poured on Marina's hair and the melody of 'Marrying her Daughter' was in the air, the touristic performance might offer them temporary spiritual and aesthetic nourishment. Such experience echoes sociologist Wang Ning's (1999) analysis of existential authenticity in tourism. As Wang (1999) suggests, authenticity sometimes has nothing to do with the toured objects. Some tourists might get strongly involved by linking the experience with personal feelings (Kim and Jamal 2007).

However, most foreign tourists in the Naxi Wedding Courtyard were more comfortable to act as members of the audience rather than as actual participants in the wedding rituals. Even though they clearly understood that the Dongba wedding ritual is only a form of game, most of them (like Johnson) still felt very awkward about participating. Instead, they preferred to watch the ritual and join the dancing at the end of the ceremony. As the wedding ceremony is targeted at Han Chinese tourists, the service includes elements of both Naxi and Han wedding customs. This combination is a clear strategy of customizing Naxi heritage to the tastes of Han tourists, integrating the familiar with the strange or exotic. Yet, as the wedding ceremony is completely alien to Western tourists, they experience the ritual in a different, often awkward, way.

Conclusion

Serving as a microcosm of romantic consumption in Lijiang, the Naxi Wedding Courtyard offers its guests an alternative experience to their urban lives, an alternative experience that is both sensual and emotional. The stories of these guests not only shed light on the motivations of Chinese urbanites

who visit Lijiang but also on how the experiences of these people shape the heritage tourism industry in this place. Although Mr. Liu's company claims the wedding service is authentic and exotic, guests in the courtyard are not necessarily searching for this type of authentic experience. The social construction of the heritage space offers guests alternative experiences of romance, pleasure, and freedom. The different ways in which people seek to escape from their social environment is reflected in the unique ways these people experienced the ceremony.

Marriage ceremonies all over the world, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, have often been transformed into tourism weddings, incorporating cultural imagery beyond the culture of the marrying couple: non-Christian Japanese tourists celebrate their wedding ceremonies in American cathedrals and churches (Samuel 2007), young American couples visit the United Kingdom for a *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*-themed wedding; Chinese celebrities arrange their marriage in Fiji or Bhutan. All of these examples reflect varieties of themed wedding practices targeting romantic consumption. Within the magic space of the 'Other,' tourists participate in momentary forms of transgression, which enable them to act out their desires while pursuing an unrestrained hedonic experience (Redmon 2003).

In some of these examples, the commercialization of cultural tradition not only creates a customized heritage for tourists, but can also lead to a cultural revitalization in the local communities. This is particularly the case in a Miao village in Fenghuang County, Hunan Province, where young villagers are keen to learn their wedding customs due to the intangible heritage movement and the ethnic tourism industry (Yu and Zhu 2015).

However, since the services provided by the Naxi Wedding Courtyard are very different from both current and traditional Naxi wedding customs, only a few Naxi perceive the ceremony as a valuable experience. Designed as a customized heritage product for Han Chinese tourists, the services of the Naxi Wedding Courtyard fail to function as an educational experience or opportunity for cultural transmission, contrary to the claims of the Heritage Bureau and the manager, Mr. Liu. For this reason, the customization of the wedding as a heritage product alienates local residents further from this kind of tourism service.

The stories of guests at the Naxi Wedding Courtyard illustrate the various forms of desire and pleasure – romantic, material, and emotional – which are being performed and consumed in Chinese society. Instead of being mere spectators, these guests all actively engage in the celebration and negotiation of heritage through their romantic consumption. They do so by sharing their experiences in mass media, on the Internet, and in other public social interactions.

