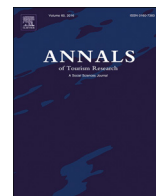




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## Geopolitical encounters of tourism: A conceptual approach

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a conceptual framework for examining the tourism encounter as a geopolitical encounter. In establishing this framework, we identify the theoretical intersection of tourism, geopolitics, and encounter in order to conceptualize how experience reflects and shapes power relations at national, regional, and global scales. We examine three dimensions—long central to tourism analysis—of the geopolitical tourism encounter: temporal encounters, bodily encounters and identity encounters. In doing so, we demonstrate the significance of tourism in the everyday dimensions of geopolitical discourse and practice. This article offers a critical lens through which scholars can theorize the geopolitical drivers and implications of the tourism encounter.

## Introduction

Reflecting on Chinese-Vietnamese relations during the ongoing territorial conflict over the South China/East Sea, a Chinese businessman visiting Danang, a large city in central Vietnam, muses, “China has helped Vietnam so much over the years, but the Vietnamese have turned against us” (Ives, 2014). Vaguely corrosive comments like this are perhaps characteristic of contemporary state narratives of Chinese and Vietnamese government officials. Yet, the fact that this gentleman was relaxing by a pool drinking out of a coconut at a luxury resort catering primarily to Chinese tourists adds a notable geopolitical wrinkle to the diplomatic contentions of the two regional powers.

In this article, we argue that everyday geopolitical encounters are regularly experienced in tourism and yet, this seemingly ubiquitous practice has yet to be fully conceptualized in tourism studies. While scholars have examined topics of geopolitical relevance in tourism in the context of, inter alia, post-colonialism (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Saldanha, 2011), war (Lisle, 2013, 2016), military occupation (Enloe, 1989; Gonzalez, 2013, 2015), border security (Timothy, 1995) and nation-building (Werry, 2011), the geopolitical implications of the tourism encounter itself have yet to be fully examined. This article builds on emerging social science scholarship that has begun to acknowledge the intersection of tourism and geopolitics (Dowler, 2013; Hall, 2017; Hall & Saarinen, 2010; Hannam, 2013; Hazbun, 2004, 2008; Mostafanezhad & Promburom, 2018; Ojeda, 2013; Rowen, 2016). Our contention is that the tourism encounter is geopolitical. Indeed, tourism encounters are invariably constituted through geopolitical discourse and practice. Thus, the tourism encounter is a place-based, multi-scalar and politically mediated geopolitical experience that is co-constituted by residents and tourists.

Our conceptual framework is based on three theoretical propositions. First, we argue that while recent scholarship on the tourism encounter has spent significant conceptual energy documenting multisensory, reciprocated, and often existential moments generated

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through tourist-resident encounters, these theorizations would benefit by scaling up the analysis to incorporate the broader associations of these embodied experiences. By incorporating a geopolitical framework that attends to national, regional, and global contexts, a geopolitically informed tourism analysis attends to the implications of the industry beyond traditionally defined “tourism impacts”.

Rather than being developed in an ahistorical and apolitical context, we contend that the tourism encounter is part of the co-production of political, economic, cultural, social and/or geopolitical assemblages. These insights draw on emerging work in critical tourism studies that identifies the explicit and subtle ways in which tourism produces a range of socio-cultural and political-economic inclusions and exclusions (Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007; Bianchi, 2009; Swain, 2009). Mobilities scholars have pointed out how tourism encounters are fluid events that are co-produced through a range of discourses, practices and actors (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; King, 2015; Sheller & Urry, 2006). These insights are significant for the analysis of the geopolitical tourism encounter. Often a highly provisional relationship between tourists and residents, the geopolitical encounter is co-produced through a series of flexible subjectivities, temporalities, and materialities.

In this paper we also seek to establish an explicit conceptual link between the tourism encounter and the geopolitical encounter. In doing so, we focus on the critical theoretical intersection of political geography and tourism studies, including the relationship between historical and place-specific contexts and ongoing negotiations of power, as well as everyday practices of diplomacy, sovereignty, and nation building.

Finally, we illustrate links between popular media and the geopolitics of tourism. We argue that geopolitical discourses of tourism’s cultural ‘failures’, clashes, or ‘misunderstandings’ reflect the ways in which geopolitical imaginaries mediate tourist-resident encounters. The scope of the geopolitical tourism encounter moves beyond an academic concept to one that holds relevance for assessing the everyday politics of tourism. In other words, the encounter provides tourism focused scholars with a lens into tourism’s quotidian power in shaping multi-scalar geopolitical relations.

In the following section we introduce the tourism encounter as a neglected cornerstone of the critical geopolitics canon. We draw on seminal literature on the tourism encounter and push it forward by identifying several theoretical intersections with geopolitics. We then conceptualize three types of tourism encounters (temporal, bodily and identity) as our points of departure to outline how everyday tourism experiences manifest in geopolitical discourse and practice. The conceptual encounters established for analysis in this paper are not exhaustive, nor are the examples used to illustrate the three types of tourism encounters necessarily representative of the breadth of moments that matter among politicized tourism subjects. Rather, we engage with specific case studies below because they illustrate the three dimensions of our geopolitical tourism encounters.

These insights open up new theoretical framings by which the tourism encounter can be reexamined through a geopolitical lens. For example, productive pathways forward may include geopolitical investigations of emotion or affect (Buda, d’Hauteserre, & Johnston, 2014; Kingsbury, 2005; Lin, 2015; Modlin, Alderman, & Gentry, 2011), place commodification (Su, 2011, 2015; Zinda, 2017), and environmental conservation (Duffy, 2015; Youdelis, 2013), to name just a few. Moreover, while we do not address other international activities with geopolitical significance such as diplomacy (Kuus, 2014; Winter, 2015), business meetings, or even academic conferences, we acknowledge how the geopolitical encounter of tourism lends itself to furthering debates about the geopolitics of cultural exchange, broadly defined.

Our framework’s entry points reflect three dominant modes of encounter in time (temporality), scale (body), and personhood (identity). Our focus on these forms represents the micro-geographies and multi-scalar dynamics of tourism encounters. To enrich these categories with examples of geopoliticized tourism encounters, we include vignettes from temporal encounters in heritage tourism among unwilling hosts in the Amazon, bodily encounters in international volunteer tourism and identity encounters in Chinese cross-straits tourism.

While we separate spatial-temporal, bodily and identity encounters for analytical purposes, we also indicate how these conceptual categories overlap and the engagement between them. Finally, there is always a risk of analytic slippage in taking something often seen as atomic like the tourism encounter and drawing on it to make broader analytic points. Thus, while we acknowledge the limits of cross-level analyses, we also see them as important points of departure for the development of broader theorizations about how the intersection between tourism and geopolitics is stitched by everyday encounters between hosts and guests.

### **Tourism encounter and the everyday dimensions of geopolitics**

At the heart of tourism is the encounter, and those with sufficient means experience them as “immediate, embodied, and geographical” (Gibson, 2010, p. 521). Indeed, the tourism encounter is an everyday, fleeting, and interactive experience with political undercurrents that reinforces as well as challenges ideologies of people and places. The tourism encounter can exist between and among people (hosts and guests or guests and guests), places, objects, and meanings. Significantly, the tourism encounter also reflects the broader notion of everyday geopolitical practice (Basham, 2016; Jansen, 2009; Williams & Boyce, 2013). By reconsidering the tourism encounter through geopolitics, the focus shifts from the place specific, ephemeral, and emotional moments of tourism in to a multi-scalar framing. What is gained in this framing is a greater appreciation for tourism’s role in the rapidly shifting global geopolitical landscape.

The encounter is perhaps the most significant facet of a tourism experience because it is ubiquitous, repetitive, and yet also includes the capacity to confirm or contest preexisting imaginaries between tourists and residents (Crouch, 2002; Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001; Crouch & Desforges, 2003). In this sense, encounters are the mundane workhorses of geopolitical imaginaries in tourism. Tourism is replete with examples of the encounter as a consequential accounting of relational difference (Tucker, 2016). Sin points out how “through tourism, tourists are in a constant engagement with various encounters in spaces” (Sin, 2009, p. 483) and

these engagements provide both the setting and catalyst for meaningful experiences with people and of places. Thus, tourists' experiences perpetuate or challenge perceptions of other people and places (Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001) and therefore play a significant role in broader geopolitical discourses which in turn, mediate geopolitical practices.

Participants construct the tourism experience in highly uneven and contingent ways based on the distinctive relational configurations of the encounter (Wilson, 2017, p. 451). Rather than being insignificant 'throwaway' moments, encounters are important instigators in the unfolding of difference, conflict, and resolution. Encounters are powerful mechanisms of engagement, partly because their informality and brevity—their seeming 'off-the-cuffness'—strips away any veneer of subtlety or farsightedness. Wilson goes on to contend that "a focus on encounter has brought the embodied figure of the tourist into view to question how geographical knowledge is produced through engagements with places and people that are in some way considered 'other'" (Wilson, 2017, p. 453).

Indeed, the construction of the self-other binary is a powerful exercise in place and identity-making in geopolitical tourism imaginaries. Playing on a range of meanings like borders, territoriality, sovereignty, inequality, development, wealth, home, and foreignness, the self-other binary links the tourist encounter with a range of geopolitical imaginaries through its various expressions, practices, and imaginations of difference. Recent work on "everyday geopolitics" parallels research on the everyday encounter in tourism by highlighting how difference is imagined, discussed, and unfolds outside of official governmental policy-making and academic debates. Much like the encounter in tourism studies, the concept of everyday geopolitics now extends well beyond traditional, state-centric models of physical landscape and territory to incorporate the discursive, bottom-up framing of space and place (Agnew and Duncan, 1989, Agnew, 2003; Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

This work is inspired by a feminist geopolitical praxis that assesses spaces thought to be "apolitical and intimate", such as the body and the domestic sphere (Williams & Massaro, 2013, p. 752). For instance, everyday geopolitics examines how people enact geopolitics through banal experiences and encounters (Dittmer, 2010; Jansen, 2009; Williams & Boyce, 2013). These sites are filled with the commonplace yet intimate interactions of everyday life. On the surface these interactions may seem marginal compared to the consequential activities of diplomats and other state-makers. Yet, the analytic power of these spaces, experiences, and narratives is imbedded in how their understated forms mask the "crucial ways in which they reshape everyday life" (Smith, 2012, p. 1513). The everyday geopolitics canon includes examples from a range of seemingly mundane experiences. Jansen, for instance, describes the visa queue as a site of embodied, everyday geopolitics through her depiction of the affective and bodily experiences with cross-border regulation among citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia (Jansen, 2009). Thus, bringing tourism studies into conversation with literature on everyday geopolitics provides new opportunities to address the lived experiences of geopolitics in tourism.

### Temporal encounters: heritage tourism and nation-building

Heritage tourism mobilizes and revitalizes local histories by providing new reasons to value (both in economic and symbolic terms) traditional practices. They also facilitate tourism encounters based on temporal relations between the past, present and future of a culture, people and/or environment. Often initiated by a range of governmental and non-governmental actors, heritage tourism also reshapes temporal imaginaries of place. Governments and institutions must select which historical sites, cultures and experiences are worth preserving for tourism as well as make critical decisions about how, for whom, and to what end heritage tourism is to be promoted and experienced. The extent to which they can be commodified for tourist consumption often weighs into these decisions. Significantly, heritage temporalities are contested, impartial, and speak to present and future possibilities as much as they speak to the historical functionality of heritage tourism sites. Laurajane Smith's seminal work on the aspirational possibilities of heritage-making is an important intervention into how the temporalities of heritage tourism complicate notions of the past, present and future. Smith explains how, "what makes certain activities 'heritage' are those activities that actively engage with thinking about and acting out not only 'where we have come from' in terms of the past, but also 'where we are going' in terms of the present and future" (2006, p. 84).

Future orientations of heritage are politicized in the sense that they complicate the idea of preservation by recalibrating it as something vital, unsettled, and open to interpretation going forward. In Smith's thinking groups unaffiliated with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the state are pivotal in moving heritage away from something historically entombed. As Chaim Noy explains, "collective remembering is a future-oriented act, which is prospective and anticipated" (Noy, 2018, p. 26). The immediacy of heritage tourism is also captured by Waterton, whose conceptualization centers on "affective and emotive values" (Waterton, 2014, p. 824) that turns heritage from something material to "practice, which, when thinking about the spaces of heritage, means shifting from static 'site' or 'artefact' to questions of engagement, experience, and performance" (*ibid.*).

In this way, heritage production is also a geopolitical practice that forces us to reconsider the kinds of questions we ask about tourism encounters. What, for instance are the implications when people living in and around national heritage sites are uncomfortable relegating their homes to tourist commodification? To answer this question we focus on the Nazaret, an indigenous group who resides in Leticia in the Colombian Amazon (Craven, 2016). Many indigenous groups in the Amazon (called *resguardos*, or reserves (*ibid.*, p. 544)), have transitioned to tourism based livelihoods based on the commodification of native handicrafts, natural/ecotourism settings, and 'exotic' lifestyles. The Colombian, Brazilian, and Peruvian governments have publicly supported the entrance of mass tourism in to the tri-border region to help ameliorate the social and economic problems associated with drug trafficking. Furthermore, an enduring regional stereotype tagging indigenous communities as lazy has justified ethnic majority and foreigner incursion in to the area under the auspices of helping residents realize the value of tourism (*ibid.*, p. 552).

Under these circumstances, many communities in the region have experienced rapid and intensive tourism development resulting in widespread environmental change and livelihood restructuring. However, the Nazaret's story ends differently. In 2011 the community made international news by "refusing to be toured" despite multifaceted pressures to do so (Yapp, 2014). Placing local

guards around the village and demanding identification for any non-resident to enter, the group quickly caught the attention of journalists who claimed they are “fed up with the tourist influx” (*ibid.*) and that they would resist all tourism interaction. Under Craven’s analysis, the reasons for denying tourists entry to their village are complex but center on what villagers feel is an under-appreciation by outsiders of the relationship they have developed between their land and labor. This is a matter of both historical importance, contemporary contestation, and future aspiration. Craven makes the case that local residents have all too clear an understanding of future impacts on their labor and environment because they have a long history of being exposed to forces beyond their control, whether it be colonialists, local, regional, and national government officials, or boosters and profiteers (Craven, 2016). The Nazaret have chosen to take a critical look at the historical and contemporary conditions of their exoticism. After so doing, they set out on a different future than the one accepted by many neighboring communities.

The village’s decision to deny tourist visits disrupts the sense that a unique site, community, or set of activities are going to be captured by a variety of powerful external forces to serve the goals of heritage tourism. Instead, the actions of a small group of village residents who decided to challenge the dominant logics of regional heritage development cascaded in to a large-scale international media event. While not making a judgment on the value of heritage tourism to the Nazaret, we point out the geopolitical underpinnings of villager encounters with tourists and the industry itself. We also note that the geopolitics of the encounters in the village are rooted in past interactions but are not limited to them: future prospects arguably seem to factor as much in to the decision to reject tourism as their historical conditions do. We thus take seriously Winter’s point that “each society...develops its own cultural norms and shared ideas of how to negotiate, mediate and delineate the traditional from the modern, the ‘authentic’ from the ‘inauthentic’” (2009, p. 107). Relatedly, Winter’s claims about the importance of heritage “‘stakeholders’, ‘values’ and ‘a plurality of voices’” (*ibid.*) shape our belief that the Nazaret case is an archetypal example of how the tourism encounter is mediated by and coproduces geopolitical outcomes.

The geopolitical power of the tourism encounter is much more than an acknowledgement that heritage tourism now turns to local community voices to establish a more equitable version of heritage. And while we certainly see analytic value in the encounter itself, we are also interested in moving past “the ways in which people interact—routinely and creatively—with heritage...in everyday life” (Waterton, 2014, p. 829). Instead, we reconsider the temporalities of heritage encounters by subverting the traditional and the historical in favor of the present and the future. Although everyday geopolitical encounters are entrenched in the past, they are not confined to them. For villagers like those in Leticia, heritage tourism is an opportunistic and uncertain path to express a particular political vision for their future. In this way, tourism encounters can also become political instruments. The Nazaret case demonstrates the political expediency that the micro-scale decisions and actions of residents have on tourism and on notions of time associated with heritage tourism.

### **Bodily encounters: volunteer tourism and development**

Tourism studies research has examined the role of embodiment in tourists’ physical activity, experiential encounters, and transformative host-guest relations in leisure settings (Bott, 2015; Buda, 2015; Gillen, 2016; Rickly-Boyd, 2012). The geopolitical literature, on the other hand, has engaged with theories of embodiment through a burgeoning treatment of, for instance, climate change, borders, migrants, police officers, and protestors (Dittmer, Moiso, Ingram, & Dodds, 2011; Jones, 2009; Williams & Boyce, 2013; Woon, 2014). While these literatures have pushed embodiment and affect theory into productive interdisciplinary and explanatory terrain, with a few notable exceptions, there has not been significant theoretical integration between the two. Thus, we contend that a focus on the role of embodiment in tourism and how it co-produces geopolitical discourse and practice is ripe for theoretical analysis.

We elucidate these points through the context of volunteer tourism in the global South. Volunteer tourism is broadly defined as a type of tourism where people pay to volunteer in humanitarian, development or conservation-oriented projects. The volunteer tourism encounter is frequently based on unequal political-economic relations among regions or states. While scholars have illustrated how volunteer tourists are transformed as a result of multisensory, affective and meaningful encounters (Griffiths, 2018; Griffiths & Brown, 2017), we argue that these critiques fall short in assessing the geopolitical dimensions of the host-guest relationship in volunteer tourism.

Ahistorical, decontextualized and depoliticized accounts of the volunteer tourism encounter often fail to link the embodied experience with the broader context in which the experience takes place (Griffiths, 2015). These encounters are inherently mediated by geopolitical discourses and practices. Volunteer tourism encounters are, in the first instance, experienced through the body. Yet, when they are decontextualized from states, power, the material “stuff” of the encounter (e.g., passports, visas, boarding passes, currency) and broader logics of political transformation, they place undue emphasis on emotional ties that often perpetuate post-colonial performances of intimacy. The geopolitics of bodily encounters in volunteer tourism is a critical point of departure for examining how tourism encounters interface with development practices.

In her work on young Singaporean citizens who participate in state-led overseas volunteer tourism trips, Harng Luh Sin demonstrates the soft power dynamics of volunteer tourism. Echoing scholarship on the geopolitical implications of the U.S. Peace Corps, Sin’s analysis describes the Singapore government’s incentives for its young people to volunteer abroad and sketches how state-initiated discourses of assistance and aid are reproduced by the volunteer tourists. While she does not put it in explicitly geopolitical terms, Sin’s work demonstrates the broader geopolitical implications of the international volunteer tourism encounter. Sin shares one Singaporean volunteer tourist’s experiences on her trip in this way: “I am brought up to believe that as long as I work hard I can succeed. And that is because I am lucky ‘cause (sic) we have many opportunities. My first reaction is to blame the locals for not working hard for themselves. But maybe there is a bigger problem of society having no opportunities” (*ibid.*, p. 495). This

comment raises questions of ethics, responsibility, and impact on hosts that parallels some of the classic debates in development studies on aid and assistance distributed throughout the non-Western world by powerful institutions in the global North (e.g. Escobar, 1995; Bebbington, 2000). It also establishes tourism as a generative force linking an individual tourist's understanding of him/herself to the relational politics of inequality and the production of the First World-Third World binary.

The role of the volunteer tourism encounter in contesting and/or perpetuating ongoing stereotypes between residents of the so-called global North and global South is reflected in touristic discourses of the experience. Mostafanezhad explicitly extends her work into geopolitical terrain through the 'popular humanitarian gaze' (2014). She defines the popular humanitarian gaze as a geopolitical assemblage of institutions, cultural practices and actors (e.g. celebrity humanitarians, alternative consumers and volunteer tourists) that co-produce and extend geopolitical discourses of North-South relations. These discourses work to naturalize political, economic and social inequality by focusing on the bodily, emotional and affective dimensions of the encounter, often overshadowing the broader structural inequalities on which the encounter is based. This work is significant for how it historicizes volunteer tourism and draws links to the sentimental, bodily encounter which has long been central to colonial and postcolonial techniques of governance (Stoler, 2002; Stoler, 2008; Wexler, 2000).

Thus, in volunteer tourism encounters the body is a key site where geopolitical discourses and practices are enacted through the sentimental cloak of altruistic development initiatives. The development encounter in volunteer tourism produces popular geopolitical discourses in development circles that depend on binary oppositions of us-them and West-Other and perpetuate the idea that "some lives are for saving while others are for being saviors" (Mostafanezhad, 2011, p. 1464). One of the persistent weaknesses with conceptualizations of volunteer tourism is that its politicized aspects are minimized in favor of the experiential veneer that the host-guest relationship takes (Sin, Oakes, & Mostafanezhad, 2015).

In other words, tourism theories of the encounter take center stage in many analyses of volunteer tourism, often leaving the geopolitical struggles that underpin the engagement either implicit or absent from the debates. While scholarship on the volunteer tourism encounter has addressed issues of inequality, development, the Self-Other binary, and authenticity, we argue that it should also be read as example of everyday geopolitics in action. Additionally, the everyday geopolitics of volunteer tourism encounters extend well beyond the embodied experience itself. They are reenacted in popular and social media that both critique and condemn the geopolitical implications of the experience.

Over the past decade, critiques of these images have proliferated in popular and social media, thus perhaps indicating a shift in geopolitical discourses of international development in the global North. For instance, the blog and linked Instagram account, *Barbie Savors: The Doll that Does Africa* is a popular parody of white, 20-something volunteer tourists in Africa (<http://www.barbiesavior.com>, accessed 29 October 2018). The developers explicitly critique the White Savior complex that is reflected in many volunteer tourists' social media sites. The website includes a cartoon video parody entitled "How to Get More Likes on Social Media" which highlights the everyday and seemingly benign experience of posting images of one's volunteer tourism trip (see <https://www.radiaid.com/social-media-guide/>, accessed 29 October 2018).

It also points to how participation in the volunteer tourism experience extends beyond the volunteer tourists themselves. In another popular critique of the volunteer tourism encounter, the blog, *Humanitarians of Tinder* identifies white volunteer tourists who post images of their volunteer tourism experience with children of color on Tinder, a popular dating app. The site draws attention to how these re-presentations of the volunteer tourism experience reproduce the racialized, classed, and gendered as well as geopolitical dynamics of the volunteer tourism experience. The geopolitical encounter resonates with the embodied aspects of volunteer tourism because "it provides tools that enable us to see the way in which power operates in similar ways across disparate sites and scales" (Massaro & Williams, 2013, p. 567). Thus, when photos of the volunteer tourism experience are posted on social media and dating sites, they can perpetuate and/or contest geopolitical discourses and practices.

### Identity encounters: Chinese cross-straits tourism and the state

In 1958, the phrase 'the ugly American' appeared in the bestselling novel of the same title (Lederer & Burdick, 1958). The phrase was widely deployed to describe the cultural insensitivity and arrogance of the American tourist. While the concept of the 'ugly American' is arguably still widely used, it has taken on a new form in the context of Chinese international tourism (Mostafanezhad & Promburom, 2018). If the twentieth century generated the stereotype of the 'ugly American' because it was deemed to be the 'American century', the twenty-first century is increasingly being articulated as the Chinese Century as a result of transition of geopolitical economic power to the 'Middle Kingdom'.

The 'ugly Chinese' tourist stereotype, and the underlying political-economic rise of the country is reflected in popular media globally. Today, readers opening the travel section of international newspapers frequently come across stories about Chinese tourists behaving 'badly', or not following the conventional codes of tourism conduct. For example, they are depicted in popular media as fighting with flight attendants (Chen, 2014), other tourists (Chan, 2016), and tour operators (Macan-Markar, 2017); defacing famous historical relics (Guilford, 2013a), smoking (Lau, 2015), spitting (Levin, 2013), and gesturing offensively (Smale, 2017).

In a well-known global outreach campaign to discipline both tourist perpetrators and assuage concerns from people in host countries, the Chinese government drafted a document naming Chinese citizens who are 'black-listed' from overseas travel (Kuhn, 2015) and another entitled "The Guide to Civilized Tourism and Travel", which is designed to educate Chinese on how to behave while on holiday (Guilford, 2013b). Reflecting a belief that the current conduct of Chinese tourists foreshadows societal degradation, a popular Beijing-based blogger, Hung Huang, lamented "that China is a lawless, poorly educated society with a lot of money [and] is going to take its toll on the whole world" (Levin, 2013).

While these stories mostly elicit chuckles or headshakes from readers, they leave out the important voices of the accused. Popular

media representations of People's Republic of China (PRC) tourists, in other words, emphasize brief moments of transgression devoid of the encounter's context and meaning. The emerging academic literature on the travels of PRC tourists, however, brings added intellectual value to the conversation by foregrounding PRC tourist identities considering their newfound status as upwardly and globally mobile travelers.

What we find in these accounts are rich perspectives that bring tourism to bear on issues such as human rights, democracy, diplomacy, and multifaceted understandings of freedom. That the most consequential geopolitical tensions facing China and Taiwan and Hong Kong today—sovereignty, independence, nationhood—are filtered through tourism are indicative of the power that tourism has in shaping individual identities and the political relationship between the nations. For instance, Ian Rowen describes how a young female Chinese tourist, Peihan, found herself in the middle of a protest surrounding Taiwanese sovereignty. During the protest she exclaimed: "Wow, speech here is so free. Taiwan is definitely different than the Mainland. See this [pointing to demonstrators]? We don't have this. Taiwan is a bit tense and excitable. It's kind of weird" (Rowen, 2017, p. 30).

For an overseas tourist to become reflexive of their national identity while traveling to a new place is, of course, not novel, but what stands out in Peihan's account is the tourist's sense that because protests do not occur in mainland China, they are not normal. Her narrative also suggests that Chinese identity is embodied in a calmer and more predictable kind of person uncomplicated by Taiwanese forms of contestation and public rebuke.

The expression of Taiwanese political power through participation at a demonstration, Peihan believes, transforms their identity as a typical citizen of a nation-state. A street encounter such as the one Peihan witnessed provides a brief yet immediate opportunity to come face-to-face with the unique ways in which nationhood is expressed in a place that is both different from and similar to her own. Additionally, her experiences convey a sense that differences between China and Taiwan are brought into being through the confluence of tourism and geopolitics. For Peihan, the sense of dynamism prevalent in the street politics of Taiwanese nationhood develops a fuller, arguably more unique view of Taiwan than one she held before she visited the island.

This sense of geopolitical difference articulated through tourism encounters contrasts to other PRC tourist respondents of Rowen's who, while visiting Sun Moon Lake in Taiwan (one of Taiwan's most popular attractions for mainland Chinese tourists), unexcitedly believe they are traveling within China. "I feel like this is more or less the same as touring in China proper (neidi)", says one participant on a group tour. "We get on the bus, get off the bus, take some photos, eat, shop, jump back on the bus, and go back to the hotel. It's all the same. We all know that Taiwan is a part of China, anyway" (2014, p. 69). These everyday diplomatic gestures serve the purpose of maintaining their government's claims of sovereignty over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau without explicitly stating that Taiwan is a part of China. Indeed, comments like these may be even more penetrating than the blunt statements about nationhood arising from the Chinese government. This is because they work at a soft power level and an embodied scale to undermine the work Taiwan has established in making itself distinctive from China through its unique tourism offerings, itineraries, and experiences.

In a fitting bookend to the argument that geopolitics is embodied in tourist identities, Rowen adds that mainland Chinese tourists often rehearse a well-known political phrase combining China and Taiwan—"same race, same culture/tongzhong, tongwen"—when describing Taiwan as a tourist destination (*ibid.*, p. 70). This move legitimizes Chinese national identity in several ways. First, it proves the populist effectiveness of the Chinese government's official statements defending its claim over Taiwan by showing that tourists also collapse what is potentially seen as two cultures and peoples into one. Second, it weakens efforts by the Taiwanese government to create a sense of territorial distinctiveness from China through its tourism offerings. If visiting Taiwan is the same as traveling through China, so the Chinese tourist mentality outlined above goes, how can Taiwan stand on its own two feet diplomatically? Third, it reinforces a stereotypical geographical myth that territorial borders are created and defended by people of the same race and culture. This narrative circulates around the world and is personified through an experience as commonplace as the Chinese mainland group tour to Taiwan.

Identity encounters in tourism play on longstanding if disputed notions of cultural and racial unification of the sort repeatedly raised by the Chinese lawmakers in justifying their territorial rights over Taiwan. In this case Chinese tourist narratives become another in a set of place-making instruments reinforcing territorial sovereignty. On the other hand, there are also numerous examples from the practices and imaginations of Chinese tourists that unsettle notions of the geopolitical strategies of the state. For some, touring Taiwan is a motivating force to question the geopolitical ideals of the state, and on a more prosaic level this kind of tourism triggers reflections over one's national identity and the territories embodied therein. In Cross-Straits tourism, the unfolding of tourist identities shines light on the geopolitical undercurrents forged through encounters with people, places, and material objects.

## Conclusion

In this article, we offer a conceptual framework for examining the tourism encounter as a geopolitical encounter. We outlined three dimensions of the tourism encounter familiar to tourism scholars and reconceptualized them through a geopolitical framing. Our focus on temporal encounters, bodily encounters and identity encounters highlights the everyday dimensions of geopolitical discourse and practice in tourism. Thus, we demonstrate how emerging scholarship in critical geopolitics can contribute to new conceptualizations of several core themes in tourism studies.

Our conceptual framework is enlivened through the multi-scalar and intersectional aspects of the geopolitical nature of tourism encounters. The encounter is the lifeblood of the tourist experience and is a core if overlooked geopolitical practice. Indeed, the mundane and routinized dimensions of the encounter (in both tourism and geopolitics) are critical machinery driving nation-building, development, resistance, and state-led initiatives. Relatedly, the scholarly fields concentrating on the encounter in tourism studies and geopolitics have forged two parallel, yet rarely intersecting tracks. The goal of this paper is to highlight their overlapping

and complementary itineraries.

The geopolitical moment, like the tourism encounter, does not exclusively rest at the level of the everyday. While attention to the banal in tourism geographies often restricts the scale of analysis to the micro-geographies of encounter, through a geopolitical lens these encounters are scaled up to consider the encounter's relationship to the region, nation, and world. From a multi-scalar perspective, it can be discerned how tourism becomes routinized as well as theorize the role of the body in broader geopolitical discourses and practices. By not considering the geopolitical implications of the tourism encounter, we run the risk of overlooking the broader implications it holds for the shaping of broader narratives of territorialization, securitization and state-building in and through tourism. The above discussion places leisure, mobility and embodiment at the center of geopolitical experience and the scalar relations it produces.

By focusing on the everyday and the mundane, recent trends in geopolitics leave space for a rethinking of the role of tourism encounters in the production of geopolitical discourse and practice. The arguments presented above are representative of how tourism encounters redirect claims on state territoriality away from conventionally powerful actors and institutions and instead demonstrate how tourism places geopolitical power in the hands of the supposedly apolitical spaces of leisure. In so doing the framework sheds light on the varied ways through which geopolitics is shaped by the everyday physical, ideological and embodied encounters with people and places in tourism. Additionally, it is significant to note that the researcher's own geopolitical positioning should be considered in the broader re-presentation of tourism encounters.

While everyday practices of differentiation are experienced by all tourists, they are rarely treated with political seriousness. After all, more than one billion people annually now encounter new places and people as international tourists every year. With the rapid growth of tourism, many new forms of tourism encounters are emerging (Hall and Page, 2017; Hirsh, 2016). Thus, we hope this article can be used to catalyze future research surrounding the geopolitical facets of tourism. Examples of tourism practices that may be productively retheorized through the proposed conceptual framework include an examination of geopolitical implications of intersubjectivity (e.g. race, class and gender) in the tourism encounter (Figuerola-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Perez, Morgan, & Villace-Moliner, 2015), the reshaping of the global tourism industry by the growing middle class in the Global South (Earl, 2014), or human-non-human relations (Oakes, 1999), and how these relate to broader state environmental logics (Duffy & Moore, 2010).

Finally, the conceptual framework of the geopolitical tourism encounter can be mobilized in several intellectual and non-academic fields. On the intellectual front, the geopolitical encounter in tourism can be utilized in the social sciences and humanities to critically elaborate on tourist intentionality, to think through cross-disciplinary modes of engagement with places and temporalities, and to attend to the politicized notions of the everyday. In management studies, geopolitical encounters in tourism can be used to understand the role of geopolitics in tourist and host motivations. We may also consider how geopolitical discourses and practices are reproduced or challenged through social media in ways that reshape relationships between residents and tourists. Thus, we hope this paper will contribute to new and emerging conversations on the geopolitical significance of everyday tourism encounters.

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