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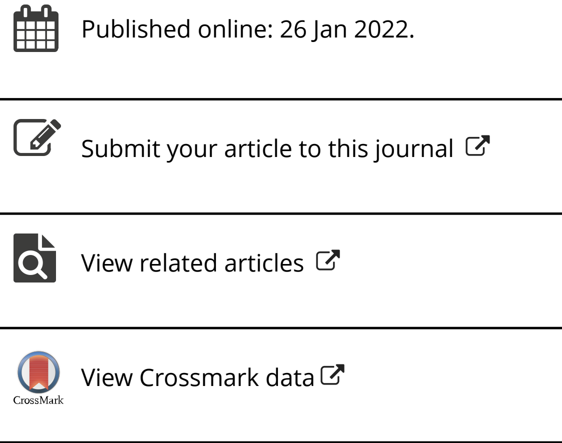

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Booking Engines as Battlefields: Contesting Technology, Travel, and Territory in Taiwan and China

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ABSTRACT
Travel booking engines can produce, resist, and destabilise popular and state-directed geopolitical representations of a world neatly divided into national and international space. Although they present as strictly functional technical platforms, booking engines obscure and omit what is contingent and contested in the production of a destination as a bordered national territory. Due to their embedding in the webs of political representation, these systems and their backers can become targets for economic boycotts, political threats, hacks, or other interventions when territorial designations are contested. Such interventions manifest as political performances aimed at multiple audiences, including tourists and travellers, as well as the businesses and political entities that facilitate or inhibit their circulation, with spillover effects into other domains of geopolitical representation. To empirically illustrate this argument, the paper analyzes the People's Republic of China's mostly successful efforts to coerce the international travel industry to relist destinations within Taiwan as belonging to China. By extending the notion of border performativity into the 'code/spaces' that span the online and offline worlds, it concludes that booking engines, like other forms of infrastructure that serve travellers and tourists, can produce popular geopolitical effects that exceed their own technical systems. Peering through these ruptures reveals the uneasy and unstable assemblages of travel infrastructure and territorial representation that regulate global mobility.

Introduction

Travel booking engines may at first glance appear to be simple and functional sites for making plans to arrive at a desired destination. It is precisely this banality that effaces and obscures what is contingent and contestable about the ways such online platforms name and narrate the places they list. In this sense, as with other oft-overlooked aspects of travel and tourism that reproduce and potentially destabilise popular geopolitical understandings of a globe neatly divided into national and international domains, booking engines perform,

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produce, reproduce, entrench, and occasionally undermine everyday practices that politically partition space. Due to this geopolitical instrumentality, booking engines, their programmers, system administrators, and state and corporate backers have become targets for economic boycotts, political threats, technical hacks, and other interventions. Such interventions have taken the form of political theatre aimed at multiple audiences, including tourists and travellers, as well as the state and corporate actors that facilitate their flows.

This paper examines one such case in detail – the 2018 campaign, undertaken by authorities in the People's Republic of China (PRC), to demand that international airline and hotel businesses re-designate cities in self-ruled, de facto independent Taiwan as cities within China, even though the PRC has never exercised sovereignty over Taiwan. The PRC's demands were largely met, and their impacts within popular media and on industry practice served as a keen demonstration of the geopolitical potency of tourism and travel, as an instrument of economic pressure and territorial representation. Bridging online and offline spaces, I examine this episode as an example of the political instrumentalization of travel and tourism through the code/spaces of booking engines and airports.

Tourism, as a mode of both recreation and capital accumulation, fuels vast industrial networks with profound impacts on physical and cultural landscapes. Tourism's multi-sensory performances of national iconography, memory, and myth makes it an ideal fit for a study of popular geopolitics concerned with everyday practices of representation and performance (Dittmer and Gray 2010; Mostafanezhad and Promburom 2018). As for cartography, geographers and other scholars have done formidable work on the geopolitical implications of both corporate and grassroots practice (Crampton 2009; Kitchin, Gleeson, and Dodge 2013; Merel 2016; Perkins 2004), but there remains much work yet to be done on the cartographic targeting of online spaces by state actors seeking to use travel and tourism's economic incentives to achieve geopolitical ends. Therefore, this argument builds on growing scholarly attention to the geopolitics of tourism (Gillen and Mostafanezhad 2019; Rowen 2014, 2016; Szadziewski, Mostafanezhad, and Murton 2022), popular and otherwise, and puts it in further conversation with critical cartography.

The paper proceeds as follows: First, I provide a conceptual framework to help explain how booking engines can be incorporated into geopolitical projects that target tourists and travellers in the interest of pursuing territorial claims. My framework draws the 'map spaces' of tourism together with the 'code/spaces' of software systems to examine the geopolitical effects of toponymic inscriptions and their interplay between online and offline spaces. I further develop this analysis through an expanded notion of 'border performativity' that spans the code/spaces of travel and tourism infrastructure. After constructing this conceptual edifice, I examine the PRC's mostly successful efforts to reclassify destinations within Taiwan as belonging to China, based

on analysis of primary state and industry communications and secondary media reports. Finally, I discuss this campaign's relation with other modes of territorial representation.

The Code/Spaces of Airline Booking Engines

Destinations delineated by travel booking engines often correspond to and sometimes contradict popular representations of national and international space. Travel destinations become legible as such through the inscription, repetition, appropriation, and revision of toponyms, or place names. Acts of naming are performative – they enact and produce what they name – making them targets for intervention and contestation. As Hui writes specifically of spaces within Taiwan, but applicable elsewhere, 'the process of toponymic inscription is a contentious process, in which national subjectivities and political ideologies are evoked and territorialized' (Hui 2017, 917).

Tourism destinations and the borders that bind and bisect them are not only produced through toponymic inscription, but also by the 'overlaying of inscriptions' known as mapping (Pickles 2004, 5), with all their performative capacities and political entailments (Crampton 2009). Maps not only reflect various ideologies and relations of power, but can be put to work as devices to reshape them, as made clear by Boria's history of World War II propaganda maps and geopolitical cartography (Boria 2008; Moore and Perdue 2014). Names and maps are inscribed in devices such as passports and visas, the compulsory use of which enrols not only tourists, but other subjects in what Salter has called a 'global mobility regime' of travel regulations, facilitated and enforced by embassies, immigration officers, and so on (Salter 2006). Border crossing often hinges on the decision of border guards, which performatively assent to or deny rights of movement based on determinations of national citizenship (Amoore 2006; Salter 2007).

My approach here hones in on the performative qualities of toponymic inscription by highlighting the specific analytic of *border performativity*, the idea'that borders are not only geographically constituted, but are socially constructed via the performance of various state actors in an elaborate dance with ordinary people who seek freedom of movement and identification' (Wonders 2006, 64), into the online spaces of booking engines. Exploring this 'dance' of travellers and territoriality between the off and online worlds, I will suggest, sheds light on the manifold ways that borders are performed and contested not only in embodied but in virtual spaces.

Border performativity can facilitate the 'central claim of the sovereign state: that there is an inside/outside division in global politics', argues Salter, and operates in three registers: 1) The formal, which includes the description and defence of particular borders; 2) the practical, which includes enforcement of

border controls and facilitation of crossing; and 3) the popular, which includes the 'overtly public and political contestation over the meaning of the border' (Johnson et al. 2011, 66), on which this article focuses.

Treating travel and tourism, and the cartographic devices that enable or disable mobility, through a performative lens affords an exploration of how borders are performed, enacted, and sometimes undermined and disrupted. My mobilisation of performativity departs from its most common usage in the tourism scholarship, in which variously tourists are variously portrayed as spectators that 'gaze' at the performances of hosts (Urry and Larsen 2011), borrowing from Foucault), or sometimes as performers in their own right (Edensor 2000). Rather, following critical international relations scholars and geographers such as Gregson and Rose (2000) that have drawn from the classic work of Judith Butler (1993), my argument figures the capacity of performance to produce, reproduce, and disrupt subject positions and territories. As critical IR scholar David Campbell has argued (Campbell 1998), the performative practices of 'foreign policy', including official statements by state authorities, are themselves constitutive of nation-states, and their concomitant divisions between self and other, internal and external, domestic and foreign, home and abroad. Such performances involve 'a process of recitation and repetition ... that is constrained by cultural and historical practices, but which also gives rise to new formations and possibilities' (Bialasiewicz et al. 2007, 407).

Like all good theatre, tourist performance depends on props and pageantry, continuity and consistency. Performative props for international travel include passports, visas, and other devices that claim citizenship and confer the right to travel. These devices and practices constitute and communicate the division between inside and outside that delimit the territories of sending and receiving states, contested or otherwise (Torpey 2000; Navaro-Yashin 2012). Circulating as components of tourism's hybrid assemblages, along with a wide variety of other material and discursive practices, they represent, enact, and suffuse national and international divisions of space (Franklin 2004; Franklin and Crang 2001; Salter 2013).

Before I extend this argument into virtual spaces and online platforms, allow me to illustrate border performativity with the vivid example of the PRC's passport maps: In 2012, the PRC released a new passport that included images of sites in Taiwan, as well as of disputed territories in the Himalayas, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea, including parts of Kashmir (controlled by India), the Spratly Islands (claimed by Vietnam and the Philippines, among others), and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (claimed by Japan) (Tharoor 2012). Whether these representations of internationally-disputed territories – "stray maps", as a US State Department spokesperson dismissed them – have any legal ramifications is dubious. Nevertheless, the passport drew official rebukes from India, Vietnam and the Philippines, whose foreign ministries refused to stamp the new passports for fear of legitimising

the PRC's territorial claims. They instead provided entry stamps on separate, specially-issued forms. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council issued a sharply-worded statement in mid-November 2012: 'This [PRC passports' claim of Taiwan territory] in is total ignorance of reality and only provokes disputes.' India took the extra step of issuing visas to PRC nationals that included a map of India claiming back the disputed territories. Even if the territorial claims implicit in PRC passports had no international legal import, these tactics of bureaucratic-procedural contestation demonstrated that state foreign policy elites take their performative power quite seriously.

Such an episode helps us understand how maps do not simply mirror or represent spaces of tourism, but co-produce and influence relations within and between them. This understanding of maps is consonant with del Casino and Hanna's useful coinage of the term, 'map space', which figures the function of a map not only as representing a territory, but as acting within and upon it. Going further, it shows how their notion, initially aimed at 'tension-filled tourism spaces' (Del Casino and Hanna 2000, 28), can scale up to the level of the nation-state.[1]

The map spaces of contemporary tourism bridge online and offline domains, including the maps and country lists of airline booking engines. To conduct international travel and hotel bookings, these lists of national/territorial names are produced and reproduced not only on material objects, such as maps, itineraries, receipts, and boarding passes, but circulate through what Kitchin and Dodge have called the 'code/space' that links the everyday worlds of the material and virtual (Kitchin and Dodge 2011). This code/space is constituted through the co-production of software and spatiality.

To appreciate this point, consider the nested, hierarchical territorial ordering of most international airline booking engines. A human user starts their prospective journey by specifying a destination in a drop-down menu – usually, a continent or some broader, more diffuse region (for example, 'Asia-Pacific'), before narrowing down their selection, first by country, then by city. Even when these systems are composed of textual drop-down menus devoid of graphic elements, they function as specialised mappings which embed and convey territorial schemes, and can have socially-mediated material effects upon them.

The seeming objectivity and banality of an airline and hotel booking engines' drop-down country menus bely a series of choices about invisible datasets and visible territorial representations. These include the use of ISO or Unicode standards, which constitute an infrastructural space with extraordinary transnational reach, the construction of which is unaccountable to the vast numbers of users that grow dependent on them (Easterling 2014). With every click, booking engine users cite and reproduce popular and occasionally inconsistent representations of territorial division. As they peruse place names and scroll past flags and other elements of national iconography, they

participate in forms of banal nationalism so familiar from the domestic stage (Billig 1995; Koch and Paasi 2016), however put to work here in the pursuit of international border crossing.

As Kitchin and Dodge observe, revising Lessig's famous dictum, 'Code is Law', code is only law inasmuch as it is mediated and enforced through social and spatial practice. Places with contested or ambiguous sovereign claims, such as Taiwan, unsettle the normativity of hierarchical nesting implicit in these territorial coding schemes. Challenging these schemes – whether through threats of boycotts or legal action or otherwise – may have limited impact on the practice of sovereignty within the territorial space of the contested polity. Yet, the exercise of the threat and its realisation in the virtual space of the booking engine can effectively serve as a form of performative geopolitics with broader effects on targeted businesses and their modes of public expression.

As with various forms of infrastructure, the existence of which is often only noticed at points or moments when they break down (Star and Ruhleder 1996), performative practices harbour the possibility of a failure of repetition. These failures can open up new and previously unimaginable possibilities, as noted above. Furthermore, when tourism is subject to changing constraints, prohibitions and taboos – when the contours of state territory and national identity are as vague, shifting, and contested as they are in the case of China and Taiwan – possibilities for breakdowns, ruptures, or novelty multiply in fascinating ways. The following section examines one such peculiar and illuminating episode, in which a PRC government agency demanded that international airlines re-code Taiwan's airports to be represented as part of Chinese state space.

Tourism, Border Performativity and Code/Spaces of a Contested State

The case of China and Taiwan dramatically demonstrates the geopolitical operation of border performativity through the code/spaces of regional and global travel. Although this may seem to be an extraordinary case, contoured as it is by clashing territorial claims, it is precisely its extraordinariness that makes it valuable for considering the popular geopolitics of tourism in general. So much is taken for granted in the scholarship and practice of tourism that the study of an extraordinary situation may uncover what, through repetition, has come to seem ordinary – a world split into nation-states with mutually exclusive territories, a global mobility regime of visas and passports, and so on – but which is in fact an unlikely and unstable configuration of spaces, bodies, and practices.

To make this plain, I first provide a brief history of the China-Taiwan territorial dispute and some of the border performances that have ensued by and for tourists and travellers. This includes an account of the striking inconsistencies in the ways that Taiwan and China are represented at their

respective airports, and the distinctive arrangements that facilitate the border-crossing of their respective citizens. I then examine the geopolitically-driven collapse of tourism between the two polities, which accelerated even before the COVID-19 pandemic put the brakes on outbound Chinese tourism. Finally, I turn to the PRC's campaign to promote its territorial claims to Taiwan through targeted interventions in the code/spaces of international travel booking engines.

Mass tourism from the PRC to Taiwan began in 2008 when, even as it pointed thousands of missiles towards Taiwan, it started sending millions of tourists the same way. The tourists were welcomed not only by a travel industry eager for new sources of revenue, but by President Ma Ying-Jeou, who was elected earlier that year. President Ma claimed that the opening would strengthen the economy and improve Taiwan's relations with what he called 'mainland China'. The tourists, said Ma's administration, might return home with a positive impression of Taiwan's democracy, which would lead to mutual understanding and maybe even political reconciliation (Lin 2014). Still, despite the growing flow of leisure travellers and the social, economic, and political connections that they facilitated, citizens and officials on both sides of the Taiwan Strait didn't quite agree on the cultural character or spatial definition of the territories they were travelling between.

A potential for tension should have been clear, for 2008 was not the first time that Taiwan had received a rapid influx of arrivals from China. Sixty-odd years earlier, at the close of World War II, Taiwan was overwhelmed by weary and desperate soldiers serving the Chinese Nationalist Party, who were then retreating from the military advance of the Chinese Communist Party. These soldiers and the party-state apparatus they propped up, the Republic of China (ROC), occupied Taiwan in 1945 with the support of the US after imperial Japan was forced to end its half-century of colonisation. Many Taiwanese saw the military men as uncouth and unhygienic, qualities not so dissimilar from those later attributed to 21st century tourists. But unlike 21st century visitors, these soldiers had nowhere to return to after the CCP consolidated its control and established the PRC in 1949 in Beijing. They instead were pressed to enforce the repressive and often murderous rule of the émigré ROC in Taiwan, and sometimes also suffered violence themselves under the authoritarian regime (Yang 2020). Even after the lifting of martial law and the acceleration of democratic reforms in 1987, Taiwanese have continued to live under the ever-present threat of a new Chinese military invasion, this time from the PRC, whose leaders have pledged to eventually 'reunify' Taiwan by any means necessary.

Taiwan's management of inbound Chinese tourism has been shaped by shifts in its political administration as well as by the PRC's own shifting policies. Although Taiwan's then-authoritarian leadership first permitted ROC citizens to visit China in 1987, and PRC citizens were permitted to

enter Taiwan for family visitation the following year, the PRC did not open the door for mass leisure tourism until the 2008 election of Ma Ying-jeou, who promised economic growth by pursuing closer ties with China.

These new tourism mobilities, including direct cross-Strait flights and packaged tours, were predicated on the rhetorical formulation of the '92 Consensus', a diplomatic fiction which refers to the reconstructed outcome of meetings between quasi-official PRC and ROC representatives held in 1992. Although these meetings did not actually result in any jointly-written statements, ROC participants later claimed that both sides agreed that each belong to one country called 'China', but allowed that each side may have different interpretations of what that 'China' is (Saunders and Kastner 2009).

Crafted with a rhetorical device as territorially fuzzy as the 92 Consensus, tourism manifested with yet more confusing and often contradictory performances of Taiwan's sovereignty both within and beyond its borders (Rowen 2017). These confusions can be seen at airports, among the most emblematic yet peculiar sites of bordering within bordered nation-states, both reproducing and disrupting the fixities of domestic and international space (Salter 2007). Ambiguities about the territorial status of Taiwan's several international airports are on display within their physical spaces as well as within China's airports. For example, within airports in China, as well as seen on major booking engines such as ctrip.com, Taiwan is consistently represented as a non-international destination, always grouped together with the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions in separate terminal and display areas: 'International and Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan Flights'. In contrast, Taiwan's terminal layout and signage simply designate mainland China-bound flights as 'International', as do Taiwanese booking engines, such as Eztravel, which sometimes group mainland Chinese destinations together with Hong Kong and Macau.

The representational contradictions extend into physical sites for reciprocal border crossing. Within Taiwanese airports' Immigration and Customs zones, PRC nationals queue up with international travellers in the 'Non-Republic of China passport holder' line. ROC passport holders enter the line for local nationals, which does not use the word 'Taiwan' and is labelled for 'Passport holders of the Republic of China'. This is markedly different than the border-crossing arrangements in Chinese airports, where Taiwanese travellers must enter the same line as Chinese travellers and use 'Taiwan Compatriot' travel permits or ID cards, which have become essential not only for cross-Strait border-crossing but even for domestic train ticket bookings within China.

Dancing around these differences by using diplomatic niceties like the 92 Consensus and mobility devices like special entry permits (instead of visas), and with the encouragement of major state and industry players, Chinese tourists rapidly grew into Taiwan's largest inbound market segment in just a few years after the 2008 opening. However, after much initial fanfare,

tourism's deleterious social and environmental impacts, and disappointing economic outcomes raised concerns within Taiwan. By spring 2014, a services trade deal between Taiwan and China, which included a number of provisions that would liberalise Chinese investment in Taiwan's tourism industry, triggered the largest popular protest in Taiwan's history (Ho 2015; Rowen 2015). This movement prefigured the landslide 2014 midterm and 2016 presidential election win of the Democratic Progressive Party, which has consistently advocated for Taiwanese self-determination, making it anathema to the PRC. The PRC responded to the election results by sharply cutting outbound tourism to Taiwan and blaming the cuts on Taiwan's incoming president, Tsai Ing-wen, for not accepting the 'One China' language embraced by her predecessor.

The PRC's geopolitically-motivated campaign against Taiwan's tourism industry went global in April 2018, when the Civil Aviation Administration of the PRC took the extraordinary step of sending letters to 44 international air carriers to demand that they remove 'Taiwan' entirely from their list of country and region destinations, and instead designate Taiwan and Taiwanese airports as part of China on their websites, mobile device applications, and in promotional materials (Chan 2018a).[2] The letter further insisted that Taiwan be represented as the same colour as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau on all visual maps, and not to be listed as a part of any other geographical region, such as Southeast Asia.[3] This followed the denunciation of a US carrier, Delta Airlines, which had listed Taiwan and Tibet as countries on a drop-down menu, for which its CEO issued a 'grave apology' earlier in 2018 (Chan 2018b).

Taiwan's Presidential Office spokesman Alex Huang pitched the PRC's letter as an issue of grave import beyond the region: 'This isn't just a cross-strait issue, it is a threat to the international democratic community' (Kotoky 2018). Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a strong objection, 'As a sovereign country, Taiwan's achievements in democracy, freedom, human rights, and rule of law have been universally praised by the international community ... The measures the Chinese government has taken to threaten and intimidate foreign companies over its false claims will not alter the above-mentioned objective fact, and will only increase the Taiwanese people's resentment towards the Chinese government'. (Chase and Fife 2018).

However, most airlines, fearful of losing the business of the larger market across the Strait, complied quickly, but in a variety of ways that demonstrated the *improvisational* qualities of border and territorial performances even in the virtual spaces of websites and booking engines. These responses were further affected and amplified by the state and diplomatic mission responses of China, Taiwan, and administrations trapped between them.

Australia's Qantas was among the first international flag-carriers to explicitly capitulate to the PRC's demands. This came with the tacit approval of Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who stated that 'Private companies should be free to conduct their usual business operations free from political pressure of governments … [but] the decision of how Qantas structures its website is a matter for the company's management' (Yeung 2018). Germany's Lufthansa, which already had a joint venture with Air China, likewise chose 'Taipei, China'. Air India opted instead for 'Chinese Taipei' (Kwok 2018), the awkward neologism that Taiwanese athletes are forced to compete under in international sporting events such as the Olympics, or even when hosting the international events *within* Taiwan, as had happened with the Summer Universiade (Horton 2017).

Air Canada quickly relisted Taipei as 'Taipei, China' and announced a joint venture with Air China, a PRC national carrier, only weeks later (Vanderklippe 2018). Canada's state agencies espoused a similar stance as that of Australia, with a spokesperson for the Department of Global Affairs stating, 'Air Canada is a private company and responsible for the contents of its website. Canada's long-standing position on this issue has not changed'. This move was cheered by the Chinese embassy in Ottawa, whose spokesperson declared, 'Foreign enterprises operating in China should respect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, abide by China's law and respect the national sentiment of the Chinese people … The change made by Air Canada is in line with the one-China principle and consists with the international commitment and obligation that Canada ought to honour. We appreciate that'.

Officials in the US, which was then entering the early stages of a trade war with China, initially protested the threats. President Donald Trump colourfully denounced them as 'Orwellian nonsense' and part of 'a growing trend by the Chinese Communist Party to impose its political views on American citizens and private companies' (Staff 2018). Although Delta Airlines apologised for its 'grave mistake' of listing Taiwan as a country, it, like United Airlines, eventually employed the novel strategy of removing country designations for cities in *both* Taiwan and China. Departing from their standard city/country arrangement (for example, 'Paris, France'), they instead began listing 'Taipei' and 'Beijing' as standalone destinations without affixed countries. American Airlines, on the other hand, removed 'Taiwan' as a country designation, but did not replace it with China, although they did maintain 'China' as the country designation for cities within the PRC.

Even more creative strategies were used by Japanese carriers All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines, which displayed the destinations differently depending on the language of the user. The Chinese-language sites changed 'Taiwan' to 'China Taiwan', while all other sites simply retained 'Taiwan'. Anomalously, Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific moved to list Taiwan as

'Taiwan, China', but listed Chinese cities such as Shanghai as 'Shanghai, mainland China'. Meanwhile, its own headquarters were listed as 'Hong Kong SAR' with no affixed country designation.

While there is perhaps some small irony in the PRC letter's unintended effect of figuratively denationalising their own cities on the platforms of several airlines, or in the ambiguities assimilated into the sprawling variety of transnational and translingual approaches to territorial representation, the overall results demonstrated the effectiveness of its campaign. Yet, the diverse responses of various airlines, as well as state actors, points to the malleability of representational regimes and indeed to the performativity of the borders of a contested state targeted by an irredentist claimant.

In addition to airlines, other tourist-oriented companies received similar threats for listing Taiwan, and sometimes also Tibet, as countries. For example, the Marriott hotel chain received a takedown notice from China's Cyberspace Administration, which said the hotelier had 'seriously violated national laws and hurt the feelings of the Chinese people' by listing Taiwan and Tibet. Marriott's CEO issued a formal apology: 'Marriott International respects and supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China . . . We don't support anyone who subverts the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China and we do not intend in any way to encourage or incite any such people or groups. We recognise the severity of the situation and sincerely apologise' (Chan 2018b).

These campaigns coincided with another wave of attacks on Taiwan's tourism industry, likely meant to influence Taiwan's 2020 presidential elections. In July 2019, China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced that due to 'the state of cross-Strait relations', individual travel permits to Taiwan would not be issued to residents of 47 different cities (Chung, Zuo, and Lo 2019). Although Taiwan's economy was not particularly reliant on tourism revenues relative to other countries (World Travel and Tourism Council 2016), the announcement was shared widely in Chinese, Taiwanese, and international media markets as a typical sign of 'rising tensions', a trope that itself serves a kind of self-fulfiling and performative prophecy. Beginning just a few months later, the COVID-19 pandemic's effective end of cross-Strait leisure tourism therefore merely accelerated a geopolitically-overdetermined long-term trend.

Discussion and Conclusion

Contemporary tourism and travel rely on a variety of actors and institutions involved with toponymic inscription, including state administrations, media and publishing businesses, and software databases and hardware networks, which can take immense amounts of economic incentives and ideological work to mobilise for territorial projects. In this case, economic threats against

travel and tourism businesses aimed to erase Taiwan from the code/space of international airline and hotel destination designations, and thereby bolster the PRC's broader goal of effacing popular representations of Taiwan as a distinct national-territorial entity.

Complementing these attacks on booking engines were related campaigns to punish companies that had represented Taipei as a city in Taiwan, instead of China, on their websites, or even on t-shirts with maps or lists of place names (Such t-shirts are of course commodities which have long been purchased and worn by tourists to perform a cosmopolitan, well-travelled sensibility). For example, spokespeople for international clothing brands such as Coach and Versace issued apologies for representing Taiwan as an independent country, and even lost their Chinese brand ambassadors, one of whom asserted, 'At any time, China's territorial integrity and sovereignty are sacred and inviolable, and even more inseparable!' (Ma 2019). Like Marriott, Spanish clothing retailer Zara, received a takedown notice from the Cyberspace administration for listing Taiwan as a country in its website drop-down menu (Chan 2018b). Calvin Klein publicly apologised in August 2019 for a similar 'offense', stating on Chinese social media site, Weibo, 'We also reiterate that Calvin Klein completely respects and honors the integrity of China's sovereignty and territory'.

In each of these disputes, a failure to cite the PRC's prescribed territorial designation, whether or not it was noticed or intended by designers, software developers, or company executives, led to serious business risk and apologetic abjection. In this way, the provocative and politically productive potential of toponymic inscription multiplied itself, allowing for new forms of performativity in which businesses were pressured to not only technically recode their territorial designations, but to refashion their public stances into ones that championed PRC sovereign claims. Nonetheless, the fact that some businesses found creative ways to not only efface Taiwan's territorial sovereignty, but the PRC's as well, showed that border performativity allows some improvisational flexibility in the material and virtual worlds that transduce code/space.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic retrenched the physical and phantasmic borders of the nation-state (Radil, Castan Pinos, and Ptak 2021) and put global tourism on indefinite hiatus, outbound Chinese tourism was among the most celebrated components of the fantasy of endless growth promised by late capitalist globalisation (Bianchi 2009; Fletcher 2011; Harvey 2020). Such fantasies about endless growth, the erosion of borders, and the annihilation of geopolitics by geoeconomics were likewise heard during the frenzied early waves of utopian speculation about the supposedly-boundless frontiers of cyberspace (Sparke 1998). Needless to say, that ship has sailed.

However its borders eventually reopen, the PRC is likely to continue its geopolitical campaigns through the geoeconomics of tourism, among other means. It should be anticipated that other populous and economically rising

nations such as India, embroiled in its own border disputes with Pakistan and China, may follow. Such projects may target both state and industry actors, as well as coders and end-users unfamiliar or unconcerned with the geopolitical or territorial implications of particular software systems.

Efforts, however small, at resisting or countering state campaigns also deserve scholarly notice, whether conducted by other state or non-state actors (Gerlach 2015). The relative openness of some online modes of national representation – for example, the fact that a .cat domain was established in 2005 and remains available for Catalan-language users, indicates some room for popular counter-hegemonic action against culturally homogenising state drives (Atkinson 2006). But even the early enthusiasm of Catalonian cyberspace has since been eclipsed as the bulk of independence-advocating sites with a .cat domain shut down by the Spanish government (Medina 2020). This article's cross-Strait case provides further evidence of the resurgent shadow cast by the nation-state on the online territorial stage.

In conclusion, booking engines, like other forms of infrastructure that serve travellers and tourists, can produce popular geopolitical effects that ripple beyond their own systems. Such perturbances can precipitate state-scale disputes, social media campaigns, consumer boycotts, and other dramas. Such episodes are fueled through the performative capabilities of code/spaces and the geopolitical affects that circulate through and within them. Peering through incipient and growing ruptures in the global mobility regime reveals the uneasy and unstable cohesion of travel infrastructure and territorial representation. There are no doubt more cracks in our midst.

Notes

1. Maps, or in some cases their conspicuous *absence*, can also be enrolled into supranational regions: For example, in the case of China's sprawling Belt and Road Initiative, for which a definitive map does not yet and may never exist, but here even the 'blank spaces' of unspecified territorial formations have been creatively used to pursue emergent geopolitical goals (Murton 2021; Narins and Agnew 2020).
2. It is worth noting that even before the April 2018 letter, several airlines, such as Garuda Indonesia and Etihad (Abu Dhabi) listed Taipei as part of China, and only included 'Taiwan' when it was in the airport's name, such as 'Taipei, Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport' (Chan 2018a).
3. A copy of the Chinese-language letter to United Airlines was leaked to the Washington Post and is available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2018/05/05/Editorial-Opinion/Graphics/AirlineLetter.pdf (Accessed November 5, 2018).

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