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Touring in heterotopia: Travel, sovereignty, and exceptional spaces in Taiwan and China

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This article uses the case of Chinese tourism to Taiwan to theorize the mutual constitution of tourism mobilities and exceptional spaces of sovereignty. Human flows between China and Taiwan have proliferated despite incompatible sovereign claims. Since 2008, China has sent millions of tourists across the Taiwan Strait even as it points over a thousand missiles in the same direction. Taiwan, itself a “de facto state” and therefore an “exceptional space” in the normative world order of sovereign nation-states, is partly defined by its relations with China. This relationship is being refashioned through cross-strait tourism. Based on analysis of border-crossing regulations and ethnographies of tourist spaces, particularly at airports and protest sites, conducted between 2012 and 2015, this article argues that tourism mobilities are not only the effect but also the cause of transformations in the performance of sovereignty and territoriality. In other words, such mobilities not only articulate within exceptional spaces, but they can produce and reconfigure such spaces as well.

Keywords: Taiwan; China; tourism; sovereignty; territory

Introduction

In June 2014, the chief of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the China State Council, Zhang Zhijun, visited Taiwan, a de facto independent, self-ruled polity that Zhang’s office claims as a part of China. As the first ministerial-level visitor from the People’s Republic of China (PRC; hereafter referred to as China), Zhang could be considered the highest profile “*lu ke*,” or mainland Chinese tourist, in Taiwan’s modern history. His visit was hailed by mainland Chinese media as an “inspection tour” of the contested state’s territory as well as an occasion to hold meetings to direct the future development of relations across the Taiwan Strait.

His trip was highly controversial. Many of Zhang’s scheduled activities were cancelled after Taiwanese pro-independence protesters poured white paint and “ghost money” on his entourage. He chose a delicate time to tour Taiwan’s spaces of exceptional sovereignty. Following the Sunflower Movement, a major demonstration against a services trade deal with China that included tourism provisions (Rowen 2015), and with pro-independence sentiment polling at all-time highs (National Chengchi University Election Study Center 2015), Zhang’s ostensible mission to court the people of Taiwan wasn’t helped by statements from his own office. A few days prior to his arrival, the Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson announced that Taiwan’s future should be decided by people in China (Wytze 2014) rather than the people of Taiwan, who have governed themselves democratically for decades and overwhelmingly reject China’s irredentism.

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Thus, despite careful bilateral attempts at stage management for the tour, few in Taiwan were surprised that Zhang's visit provoked island-wide demonstrations.

Zhang's visit, as an outcome of previous agreements over mobility regulations, an occasion for further negotiations, and a stage for high-level diplomatic theater, highlighted fundamental political and social contradictions between Taiwan and China. With the annexation of Taiwan still a key Chinese policy priority, Zhang represents a party-state that has threatened to use military force to prevent Taiwan's *de jure* independence. Yet even as China points over a thousand missiles across the strait, since 2008, it has also sent millions of tourists in the same direction with the encouragement of Taiwan's state officials and travel industry leaders.

The development of tourism from China to Taiwan was historically constrained by Taiwan and China's conflicting sovereign claims and lack of diplomatic relations. Yet, following political changes within Taiwan and in line with China's politically instrumental deployment of tourism to other destinations (Arlt 2006; Nyíri 2010), beginning in 2008, tourism was used by the Chinese regime as a kind of economic "gift" to reterritorialize Taiwan as a part of China (Rowen 2014, 2016a). Apart from its straightforward economic impacts, travel conducted under the name of tourism has also been used to facilitate other forms of investment, political contact, and personal and business network formation. Such mobilities continue proliferating despite or sometimes precisely due to China and Taiwan's conflicting claims. Inasmuch as these tours are part and parcel of China's annexation program, they not only effectively reproduce Taiwan as a contested state, but also reproduce particular exceptional spaces that blur normative conceptions of the nation-state as a clearly bounded and coherent entity.

Travel and tourism management have also been both cause and effect of the establishment of new political offices on both sides. In May 2010, the China-administered Cross-Strait Tourism Association set up an office in Taipei, and the Taiwan-administered Taiwan Strait Traveling and Tourism Association set up an office in Beijing. This marked the first establishment of reciprocal state offices of any kind between Taiwan and the PRC. In Taiwan, this was presented as a non-political and purely functional arrangement to facilitate tourism. Said Tourism Bureau Director-General Janice Lai Seh-jen, "The new offices will focus on promoting cross-strait tourism, assisting tourists and resolving emergency situations. Issues relating to politics and foreign affairs will not be involved" (China Times 2010b). However, Chinese officials expressed hope for broader significance from the office openings. Fan Liqing, spokeswoman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said, "The move is conducive to facilitating future cross-strait development" (China Times 2010a). Several years later, a major and unsettled policy objective of Zhang's June 2014 tour was likewise the establishment of new political offices, which further harbored the potential to transform cross-strait relations.

This empirical case therefore implies a broader theoretical argument about the mutual constitution of tourism mobilities and exceptional spaces of sovereignty. I claim that changing configurations and practices of tourism mobilities are not only the effect but also the cause of transformations in sovereignty and territoriality. In other words, tourism mobilities not only articulate within and between particular national spaces, but they can produce and reconfigure such spaces as well. To demonstrate this argument, I will specify how tourism both undermines and reproduces state territory at the representational level of travel permits, and follow it with an ethnographic examination of the ways these administrative arrangements have articulated at airport border crossings and in a particular iconic tourist site that manifests exceptional forms and performances of sovereignty.

While the particular transformations of Taiwan and China's mobility regimes require detailed explanation, I provide them not to over-emphasize the exceptionality of Taiwan's sovereignty and thereby render it immune to comparative analysis, but also to suggest that attention to its unusual features can illuminate the role of the everyday, banal, and mundane – such as the use of national flags, maps, names, and travel permits – in the production of tourism mobilities and exceptional spaces elsewhere. For, as Navaro-Yashin (2012) argues in her ethnographies of the *de facto* Turkish state in northern Cyprus, looking at everyday practices of sovereignty and administration in contested states sheds light on the peculiarity of normative sovereignties more generally.

To explore how cross-Strait tourism produces both exceptional sovereign practices and spaces, this article will proceed by examining the representations of Taiwan and China's distinct but blurry sovereign and territorial regimes as materialized in the travel permits used by Chinese visitors to Taiwan. It will continue by tracing the delegation of state functions to quasi-state actors, including nominally civil agencies such as Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), which have been empowered by their respective state administrative backers to sign agreements akin to international treaties while side-stepping the inference that such formulations manifest Taiwan's status as an independent, sovereign nation-state. Moving from the high-level scale of representation, diplomatic practice, and mobility regulation to the lived world of tourist spaces, the article will continue with an examination of border crossing practices before concluding with an ethnographic account of the effects of these transformations on the ground at one of Taiwan's iconic tourist sites, the Taipei 101 skyscraper, where tourists, protesters, counter-protesters, and police square off in a dynamic space that produces an exceptional effect of multiple, overlapping sovereignties.

The account below will draw on Foucault's concept of "heterotopia", a space which is "in relation with all other sites, but in such a way to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault 1986). Taiwan itself can be read as a particularly political kind of heterotopia that subverts the Westphalian system (Mengin 2008) – a sovereign state that is not a sovereign state, a province that is not a province, a nation that calls into question the very concept of nationhood, a place "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several places, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, 25). As the nominal "Republic of China" with a distinctly Taiwanese national subjectivity, Taiwan juxtaposes and questions Chinese cultural and political elements in idiosyncratic ways (Callahan 2004).

Foucault's "heterotopia," introduced in lectures and radio addresses that were not published in print until after his death, was very much a preliminary concept that has received substantial critique. I use heterotopia here less as a descriptor of Taiwan, but more as an analytic *method* (Johnson 2013) to highlight both the familiar and uncanny in the spaces of Taiwan that are produced for and traversed by the Chinese tourist. In so doing, I will trace ways that Chinese tourism to Taiwan disrupts commonplace assumptions about not only sending and receiving regions, but of exclusive, territorially-bounded nation-states in general.

Data for this project was gathered during long-term, multi-sited, mobile ethnography (Buscher and Urry 2009; Marcus 1995) conducted between 2012 and 2015 throughout Taiwan. This included accompanying tour groups on island and city-wide tours. Semi-structured interviews were also held with a total of 64 tourists who were recruited either directly at tourist sites, or through snowballing introductions from previous respondents or my contact networks. Fourteen Taiwanese tour guides, eight Chinese tour directors,

and 22 Taiwanese vendors, site staff, or protestors were recruited in the same fashion, for either interviews or informal conversation with field notes. Based on respondent availability, interviews ranged from 10 to 75 min. Most of these interviews took place on-site; the other, more in-depth, interviews took place in hotel lobbies or cafes. Additional interviews took place with government officials and trade industry representatives at their offices.

Mobility, sovereignty, territory, and heterotopia in Taiwan and China

This article builds on past work that uses the Taiwan case to argue that tourism should be seen as a *technology of state territorialization*, that is, as an ensemble of practices that produce tourists as national subjects and, reciprocally, the territory of the nation-state itself, as effects of power (Rowen 2014, 2016a). This mutual production of national tourist and national territory takes place both domestically and internationally, and may include devices such as travel permits, practices such as border crossing and site visitation, and everything else enabled by the infrastructure of tourism, including performances of the nation-state and its territory.

Taiwan, as a contested state, provides a rich case for a study of the representation and performance of territory and sovereignty. Subject to waves of European and Chinese colonization (Teng 2004), Taiwan was claimed and partially administered by the Manchu Qing Empire, which ruled most of the territory of present-day China, before being ceded to Japan in 1895. While Japan colonized Taiwan, the Republic of China (ROC) was established in 1911 as the Qing Empire collapsed. Ruled by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the ROC occupied Taiwan with US support after Japan surrendered in 1945 at the close of World War II. In 1949, the KMT fully retreated to Taiwan as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated the ROC and established the People's Republic of China. While the ROC in Taiwan has gradually dropped serious pretences to sovereignty over mainland China, the PRC has continued to claim sovereignty over Taiwan.

In 1990, as military hostilities thawed and the profit potential for cross-Strait investment became increasingly evident, complementary “civil” agencies were set up in Taiwan and China to facilitate communication and negotiations: the Taipei-based Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF), and the Beijing-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) (Chao 2003). Such an unusual arrangement was necessitated by the legal and political systems on both sides. With the ROC constitution still claiming sovereignty over PRC territory and vice versa, neither state would recognize the legitimacy of an official agency of its counterpart. However, these agencies were clearly tied to the state apparatus – the head of the SEF was to be appointed by the ROC president, and the agency itself was to be funded and directed largely via the ROC's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), which is under the jurisdiction of the Executive Yuan (Branch). In China, ARATS was established under the state Taiwan Affairs Office, which is subordinate to the State Council.

In 1999, when then-ROC President Lee Teng-hui famously suggested that China and Taiwan had “special state-to-state relations,” China's leadership accused Lee of promoting Taiwan independence and suspended all formal talks between SEF and ARATS. A year later, Chen Shui-bian of the more explicitly independence-leaning opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected President, which marked the first time that the ROC in Taiwan had not been under KMT rule. China further hardened its

stance and refused any negotiations with SEF or any official Taiwanese agencies while the DPP controlled the presidency.

Yet the Chen administration, cognizant of the economic opportunities offered by cross-Strait tourism, as well as of the requests of wealthy China-based Taiwanese businesspeople for more convenient transportation, did attempt to reform mobility regulations through other channels. Taiwan's administration began planning to receive Chinese leisure tourists as early as 2001 (Tsai 2006b). The Chen cabinet prepared a report advocating direct regular flights in 2003, according to its Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairman Joseph Wu (Asia Pulse/CNA 2005). Holding up tourism promotion was the sovereignty dispute, a matter of names – specifically China's unwillingness to list Taiwan as a foreign country, and the Chen administration's unwillingness to refer to Taiwan as a province. In 2006, MAC vice-Chairman David Huang said, "Taiwan is not listed as a travel destination. There is currently no legal basis for Chinese tourists to apply to visit Taiwan ... When we negotiate this ... we will continue to express our stance that the Republic of China is a sovereign, independent country and that the People's Republic of China is a separate political entity" (Rickards 2006). In the meantime, limited sight-seeing had in fact been permitted in some form by China (China Post 2005), but ongoing diplomatic disagreements kept the numbers down.

The Chen administration wanted the negotiations to proceed via "official government" channels without preconditions, but China's leadership was unwilling to speak with the Chen administration, which it repeatedly criticized as pro-independence. China insisted on holding the talks via "private" channels and organizations, so as not to lend legitimacy to the Chen administration, or help it "earn any points," in the words of Johnson Tseng, the founding Director-General of the Travel Agent Association of the ROC, and a participant in these talks (Interview, 30 January 2015). One impasse was resolved in 2006 by China's founding of the Cross-Strait Tourism Association and Taiwan's founding of the Taiwan Strait Travel and Tourism Association, echoing the structure of SEF/ARATS. Though private in name, the negotiations between these two entities were still "dominated" by state actors (Tsai 2006b) with ties to industry. The names of the organizations had been a major sticking point, with China initially refusing to deal with any organization with the name, "Republic of China." Even inclusion of the name "Taiwan" was initially rejected (Tsai 2006a).

Chen was succeeded by President Ma Ying-jeou of the pro-unification KMT, who promoted the so-called "1992 consensus" as a way forward for cross-Strait relations. This discursive creation refers to the reconstructed outcome of a series of meetings between Chinese and ROC officials in 1992. As these meetings did not actually result in any joint written statements, the "consensus" was produced retrospectively and posits that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one country called "China," even if the sides have different interpretations of what that China is (Saunders and Kastner 2009). In a sense, Ma's adoption of the "1992 Consensus" temporarily maintained the actually exceptional "status quo" of Taiwan's de facto independence, while fueling popular suspicion that forces on both sides of the Strait – including Ma's KMT party – continued using state and market mechanisms to realize unification. Tourism, I suggest, has been among the most visible of these mechanisms.

Cross-Strait travel and tourism flourished in the midst of this sovereign blurriness, facilitated by complicated quasi-official, quasi-private arrangements. The unusual travel permits used by border-crossers are illustrative. Chinese tourists apply not for passports from China and visas from Taiwan, but rather for a "Mainland Resident Taiwan Travel Permit" from the PRC, and an "Exit and Entry Permit for the Taiwan Region, Republic

of China” from Taiwan. Reciprocally, ROC (Taiwan) nationals must apply for a PRC “Taiwan Compatriot Permit,” and are not able to use their ROC passports to enter China.

In July 2008, a few months after Ma’s inauguration, Taiwan received the first entry of a Chinese tour group on a direct flight, which was touted by the administration as a major breakthrough. Regularly-scheduled, commercial cross-Strait flights finally began in August 2009, following yet more rounds of talks. These developments quickly yielded considerable changes to Taiwan’s tourism industry. After the door opened in 2008, mainland Chinese arrivals rose rapidly to become Taiwan’s top inbound market within one year, and over three million tourists were arriving annually by 2014.

What can be concluded from this account? Cross-Strait tourism has articulated with a complicated sovereignty and mobility regime that is a contingent product of personal and institutional negotiations performed against a backdrop of incompatible legal and territorial claims and an ambiguous and shifting ethno-national terrain. This product, however, has been used by both state and non-state actors to affect structural changes to the sovereign regimes of Taiwan and China. Chinese leaders, still officially maintain that “One Country, Two Systems,” a scheme originally designed for Taiwan and later applied to Hong Kong (Cooney 1997), is the only acceptable arrangement. However, they have temporarily and instrumentally promoted an even more ambiguous and contradictory arrangement. What this means more broadly is that cross-Strait tourism mobilities have not only been facilitated by the establishment of exceptional spaces of sovereignty, but can also *produce* such spaces. The remainder of the article will explore the production of such spaces, from the moments of airport border crossing to a particular place-based discussion of the iconic Taipei 101 skyscraper and shopping mall.

Discussion: Sovereign superimpositions, from airport border crossings to the street scene at the Taipei 101 skyscraper

Taiwan’s airports as nested heterotopia

The international airport, as Salter has argued, is a nexus of borders and bordering practices that “connects the national and the international (also the national to itself), the domestic and the foreign, in a way that problematizes those connections” (2007, 49). With airports already a fine case for heterotopic analysis, Taiwan’s own exceptional characteristics allow its airports to be treated as heterotopia within a heterotopia.

Taipei is served by two airports: Songshan Airport, within Taipei City, and Taoyuan International Airport (previously named for Chiang Kai-Shek), which is larger and serves more long-haul flights. Other major points of entry include Taichung and Kaohsiung international airports. In Chinese airports, Taiwan is consistently represented as a non-international destination, and is always discursively grouped with Hong Kong and Macau (special administrative regions of China) in separate terminal and display areas: “International and Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan Flights.” In contrast, the Songshan and Taoyuan Airports terminal layout and signage simply designate flight arrivals from and departures to China as “International,” not “International and (Mainland) China.” In the Immigration and Customs areas, Chinese nationals must line up with other international travelers in the “Non-Republic of China passport holder” section, while ROC passport holders enter the area for local nationals, which does not use the word “Taiwan” and is labeled for “Passport holders of the Republic of China”. This contrasts with transit practice in Chinese airports, where Taiwanese travelers must enter the same

line as Chinese travelers and use “Taiwan Compatriot” travel permits (Tai bao zheng), often to their frustration (Zhang 2013).

The use of “International and Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan” signage in Chinese airports is clearly distinct from the simpler use of “International” signage in Taiwan airports. This usage implies a less ambiguous sense of Taiwan’s external boundaries than those of China, despite the artefactual quality of the ROC’s overlapping territorial claims. While the ROC constitution still specifies that mainland China and Taiwan are two different areas of the ROC (and the PRC actively claims Taiwan as part of its own territory), these legal inscriptions are decreasingly material within the life world of Taiwan. Thus, at the very point of entry for Chinese tourists in Taiwan, there is already the hint of territorial and political difference. Further compounding this visual difference is the use of traditional Chinese characters on signage, as opposed to the simplified Chinese used in mainland China.

This linguistic and spatial arrangement also resembles Hong Kong, which also uses traditional characters, and where mainland Chinese travelers must also use special travel permits and line up separately. Furthermore, Taiwan’s national flag-carrier is still named China (Zhonghua) Airlines, while China’s similarly-named flag carrier is Air China (Zhongguo). Many of Taiwan’s largest companies, on display in airport advertisements, also include Chinese-sounding names, like China Telecom (Zhonghua dianxin) and China Post (Zhonghua youzheng). This territorial-linguistic legacy of the KMT (Chinese Nationalist) party-state development, with its nationalized companies, is not entirely dissimilar to that of China, but the use of Zhonghua versus Zhongguo implies a slightly more ethno-cultural than territorial flavor.

Travelers from China to Taiwan are therefore presented upon arrival with an unsettlingly similar yet oddly displaced visual field that simultaneously recapitulates and subverts the usual circuits of mobility and contours of territorial language. For example, after I landed at the Taoyuan airport with a tour group from Shanghai in August 2014, as we entered the general non-ROC citizen immigration line with several hundred other Chinese tourists, the tour director reminded our group to take good care of the Taiwan entry permit, which he referred to as a “visa” (qianzheng). One of the group noted the image of the ROC flag on the top of the permit, and asked, “Is that Taiwan’s national flag?” His colleague replied, “What national flag?” in a tone that suggested he disapproved of the use of the term “national flag.” One of the children in the group asked his mother, “Mom, why do we need this for Taiwan?” He received no answer.

For this group and many others, the airport served not only as the physical entry-point to a long-forbidden island, but the prelude to a heterotopian journey that blurred national borders and territory.

Taiwan as a heterotopian national territory

Moving beyond the airport, Taiwan’s iconography presents a visual field of national paradoxes both to residents and visitors. As they travel through Taiwan, they see not only manifestations of the ROC, but also differences in political rationality and permitted expression. This produces exceptional, even multiple and overlapping senses of sovereignty, compounded when Taiwanese independence activists dispute not only the sovereignty of China but the legitimacy of the ROC itself.

As noted by Chinese tour directors with experience working in Europe and elsewhere, it is not only the Chinese language spoken or displayed in tourist sites that produces a sense of familiarity for Chinese tourists, but also the Chinese language and

other sufficiently familiar cultural features that pervade Taiwan. For Chinese tourists who have been taught the hegemonic territorial interpretation of Taiwan as a part of China, these cultural features simply prove a point that most rarely question.

An ironic sense of being within “China” was also noted during interviews with Taiwanese, who lamented the influx of Chinese tourists to popular tourist sites such as the National Palace Museum and Sun Moon Lake. “It’s pretty but I don’t go there anymore. If I wanted to feel like I’m in China, I’d just go to China,” said a Taipei colleague. His friends nodded in agreement. The perception of Sun Moon Lake as being “in China” is not simply due to the large number of Chinese tourists in the area, but is produced by the structure of the tourism industry itself, which features large groups, highly compressed itineraries, rushed dining experiences, and abundant commission-based shopping stops. Essentially, the collaboration of Taiwanese and Chinese tourism industry actors produces an experience so similar to that of Chinese domestic tourism that even as Taiwanese visitors express alienation, many Chinese tourists are able to overlook markers of national difference (Rowen 2014).

In an interview in the southern city of Tainan, the oldest and perhaps most quintessentially “Taiwanese” city, one tourist from Anhui stated a similar sentiment of sameness: “I feel like this is more or less the same as touring in China proper [neidi]. 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.” My roommate for a full 8-day group tour of Taiwan, a Shanghai-based construction worker from Jiangsu, said to me in the farther south town of Hengchun, “Yes, it still feels like I haven’t really left China. And especially here in the south in this poorer, more rural place. It feels even more like the countryside where I’m from. I don’t see much of a difference.” It was remarkable that the farther into the pro-independence, Taiwan-identified south we travelled, the more he perceived it as “Chinese.” I heard similar remarks from nearly every other Chinese group tourist I spoke with in Taiwan, both in formal interviews and as passing remarks.

An abundance of simplified Chinese script, Mainland Chinese-accented tourism industry workers, and Mainland Chinese-oriented souvenir shopping are not unique to tourism from China to Taiwan. Indeed, such phenomena can be found anywhere that Chinese tourists go, including the US or Europe (Nyíri 2010; Osnos 2011). In this way, Taiwan fits into a larger pattern of outbound Chinese tourist destinations that have found themselves adjusting their visual and cultural landscapes to meet the desires of this growing market segment. What these touristic manifestations of Chinese cultural landscapes do, however, is exemplify the subtle and diffuse ways that national representations articulate unevenly within particular circuits of border crossings, tourist attractions, hotels, restaurants, shops, and so on. The fraught and contested nature of Taiwan’s relationship with China adds a palpable level of political tension to what would otherwise be regularized (in)conveniences of the leisure industry.

Yet even as distinctive ROC or Taiwanese iconography and sensory indicators manifest throughout the island’s landscape, many tourists are able to overlook these markers of national-territorial difference, insisting that Taiwan is still clearly a part of China. In interviews, many Chinese tourists say that they feel as if they are still within China – not just because of China’s territorial claims but because, I argue, state and industry actors shape their touristic experience of Taiwan in ways that are very similar to those of China. In other words, a sufficient subset of the Taiwanese public and private sector effectively collaborates with the Chinese regime to produce an uneven effect of being in “China” for tourists traveling within the liminal spaces of Taiwan.

Taipei 101

Even as the Taiwanese travel industry has collaborated in the largely successful touristic performance of Taiwan as a part of China, the tourists themselves, as well as Taiwanese passing by, have become targets for protest performances of different sovereignties. It doesn't require a ministerial-level guest like Zhang Zhijun to provoke such scenes. Like the image of Zhang's paint-covered entourage with which this article began, the evolving scene at Taipei 101 exemplifies the exceptional and even ironic spaces produced by the intersection of cross-Strait tourism with Taiwan's new and evolving performative protest traditions.

The Taipei 101 mall and skyscraper, between 2004 and 2010 the world's tallest, is a mandatory stop on the Taiwan tourist circuit. With a high-end mall and an observation deck on the 89th floor, it receives at least 10,000 tourists a day, of whom 55 to 60 percent are Chinese, according to Taipei 101 spokesperson Michael Liu (Interview, 30 March 2014). This has made the public entrance of Taipei 101 both a magnet for tourists and a flashpoint for groups and individuals competing for their attention, including religious activists from Falun Gong, a religious group banned in China, as well as pro-unification and Taiwan independence activists. While members of these groups have long histories of organizational activity and demonstrations in Taiwan, it has taken the emergence of a regular Chinese tourist circuit for all of them to attempt to regularly occupy the same small public space indefinitely. The resulting space is seen as exceptional not only by Chinese tourists, but also by Taiwanese locals. Not only is it seen as exceptional, but it even exhibits a kind of legal exceptionality: Under a KMT mayor, pro-unification, pro-China protesters regularly flouted local law.

Members of Falun Gong have been demonstrating in front of Taipei 101 since 2009, nearly as long as it has received Chinese leisure tour groups. They are not only a daily presence at Taipei 101, but also at other popular tourist sites including the National Palace Museum. Their billboards now dot much of the Taiwanese countryside alongside highway bus routes. Also prevalent in international destinations, including Bali and Thailand, their visual presence is now a sure sign of the co-presence of Chinese tourists.

Like the Chinese state, the Taiwan-based, pro-unification Concentric Patriotism Association of the ROC (CPAROC) describes Falun Gong as an "evil cult." Unlike Chinese authorities, CPAROC is unable to ban them outright. Since 2013, in response, the CPAROC does something it could not do in China – launch regular counter-protests with volumes so high that they sonically overwhelm the presence of the quieter Falun Gong, even if the latter has a larger number of demonstrators. These have earned them citation threats from police for disturbing public order, but few actual tickets. In fact, CPAROC members have been caught on video kicking police, who, serving under pro-unification KMT mayor Hau Lung-bin until 2015, did not make any arrests (Hsiao 2015).

CPAROC members, often dressed in quasi-military uniforms, typically set up in front of the entrance to Taipei 101. They unloaded directly next to the Falun Gong demonstrators, unfurled both ROC and PRC flags and projected revolutionary Chinese communist anthems through loudspeakers. Typical slogans, chanted through megaphones, included "Without the Communist Party, there'd be no new China!" and "Unity of the Chinese Ethnicities" (Zhonghua minzu tuanjie). Banners called for the "Unity of Greater China" (Da Zhonghua tuanjie), with the ROC flag on the left, the PRC flag on

the right, and a stylized dragon in the middle. At every demonstration stood a man in a military jumpsuit, holding the PRC flag, saluting the tourists, as in Figure 1.

Every Taiwanese tourist or passerby available for interview expressed mild disapproval of the CPAROC. A typical comment came from a 23-year-old design student: “This is so ridiculous. I wish I had a little bomb to toss in there,” she said, smiling. Another Taiwanese shopper, a 35-year-old lawyer, asked, “Patriots? This is a patriot group? For which country? Taiwan or China?” No Chinese tourists asked similar questions. Instead, many expressed support for the CPAROC with both their cameras and cash. Numerous groups took photos of and with the demonstrators. Some even posed for shots waving not only the PRC flag, but the ROC flag next to it, a forbidden national symbol all but unseen in China.



Figure 1. An overlapping melange of pro-China and pro-Taiwan independence demonstrators at Taipei 101. (Photograph by author.)

Such an exceptional space, a political stage and battleground to influence the hearts and minds of the Chinese tourists in Taiwan, was laden with irony. The higher the PRC flag was flown, the more obvious it became to the tourists that they are somewhere very different from China. As Peihan, a 20-something secretary from Shenzhen who had just arrived to begin her 8-day Taiwan tour, told me during an interview, “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.” Peipei, a 28-year-old bank clerk from Hunan, provided a qualified endorsement of the demonstration: “We want both sides of the Strait to be closer, so we’re happy to see this, even if the commotion is unusual for us. At least someone is talking back to these Falun Gong types.”

The irony of protesters using tactics that would be illegal in China to assert Chinese sovereignty in Taiwan was not lost on the building’s managers, who complained about the difficulty of balancing citizens’ speech rights with the mall’s commercial operations. Michael Liu, the Taipei 101 spokesperson observed, “All this [protest activity] only demonstrates that Taiwan is so free, unlike where they’re coming from” (Interview, 2 April 2014).

In May 2014, a new group, The Taiwan Independence Revolutionary Army (TIRA), entered the fray. According to convener Lai Fang-cheng, TIRA is there “to defend Falun Gong from intimidation ... to show how sane and dignified independence activists are as opposed to groups like CPAROC ... and to let Chinese tourists know that Taiwan is an independent, democratic country” (Interview, 26 May 2014). Lai, who has a long history with pro-democracy and pro-independence activism, took his group to the Taipei 101 entrance for the first time on May 18. Several dozen TIRA members lined up on the sidewalk in front of the bus zone, raising flags with slogans such as: “I am Taiwanese, not Chinese”; “Taiwan is not the territory of the Republic of China”; and “The voice of Taiwan independence and nation building must not disappear without a trace.” Many flags were signed with tags like “Taiwan Nationalist Force” and “Militiamen for Taiwan Independence,” and raised as Taiwanese (Hoklo) language marching songs were projected from a loudspeaker.

On the first day of the TIRA’s outing, the CPAROC was nowhere to be seen. But one week later, on Saturday, May 25, all three groups protested for the first time in the same place at the same time, allowing for the remarkable photograph in Figure 2. In this image, we see a TIRA “militiaman” waving his independence flag directly between CPAROC’s People’s Republic of China and Republic of China flags. While Taipei 101 may have lost its exceptional status as the world’s tallest building, Taiwan’s exceptional sovereignty, and its performatively ambiguous nationalism are on full display here.

As remarkable as these photos are, what they cannot convey is the sheer sensory chaos and semiotic overload of the scene. The TIRA’s Taiwanese marching music clashed with the CPAROC’s communist Chinese anthems. Confounded tourists were unable to tell who was who. Several asked each other if the Taiwan independence and ROC flag-bearers were from the same group. Unsurprisingly, while Taiwanese expressed amusement and several foreign tourists took photos with the independence flags, Chinese tourists responded much more tepidly to the pro-Taiwan activists. A few took photos, but all attempted to avoid standing too close to them as they waited for their buses. Of the 18 tourists interviewed over one month of weekend protests, all but one assumed that the TIRA and Falun Gong were the same group, when in fact members of both groups claimed and evidenced no membership overlap. Despite being more familiar with the symbolism of street demonstrations than the Chinese tourists, many



Figure 2. Pro-unification and pro-independence demonstrators side-by-side at Taipei 101. (Photograph by author.)

Taiwanese were also unable to read through the iconographic over-saturation. For example the lawyer mentioned above couldn't tell which country the "patriotic" CPAROC group was meant to represent.

Like much of Taiwan's state space in general, this particular tourist site became a kind of protest dance of superimposed sovereignties, with each side spontaneously separating only to merge back to re-occupy the others' visual and sonic claims. This space was not quite Chinese, not quite Taiwanese, neither both nor neither. It was nothing if not heterotopian.

Conclusion

This article has traced some of the exceptional and heterotopian spaces and circuits produced by cross-Strait tourism, from airport border crossings to the protest scene at

Taipei 101. It has examined how the production of such spaces was enabled by exceptional forms of diplomatic gymnastics, including the creation of travel permits and offices that simultaneously effaced and reproduced national distinctions. Tourism was promoted by the Chinese state and some Taiwanese politicians as a sort of “gift” that would accelerate unification with China, but it instead provided a stage for unruly performances and counter-performances of different national imaginaries. In this sense, tourism was not only enabled by the representation of Taiwan as an exceptional kind of state space, but tourism itself reconfigured spaces in Taiwan in exceptional ways.

As Chinese tourist numbers increased simultaneously with Taiwanese popular support for independence, contradictions between hosts, guests, and their state administrations should have been anticipated. The handling of the visit of Taiwan Affairs Office chief Zhang Zhijun, however, raised the stakes. Most of the arrangements for Zhang’s meetings with city mayors and business leaders were made directly between the Taiwan Affairs Office and township-level politicians, largely bypassing the ROC’s Mainland Affairs Council, the state agency officially responsible for his visit (Cai 2014). In this case, not just private business but public offices at various administrative scales within Taiwan collaborated with the performance of Taiwan’s reconfigured sovereignty. In this sense, China used not just mass tourism management, but a particular high-level “inspection tour” as a tactic in its annexation program. Despite this, as with the scene at Taipei 101, protesters still disrupted the picture.

Outbound Chinese tourism to Taiwan rose steadily until the landslide election of DPP leader Tsai Ing-wen as president in January 2016. Rumors quickly swirled that China would cut group tourist numbers as some kind of retaliatory measure. While China’s Taiwan Affairs Office denied responsibility, a significant number of industry insiders claimed that these cuts were nonetheless implemented “implicitly” by spoken but unwritten government orders (Lin 2016). However the blame should be assigned, Taiwan’s National Immigration Agency statistics soon confirmed a clear drop in group tourism, suggesting that cross-Strait tourism was from the beginning more a form of pro-unification “gestural politics” than a serious effort towards “rapprochement” (Rowen 2016b).

Still, with outbound Chinese tourism on the rise to other destinations, in tandem with China’s military assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea and elsewhere, developments in Taiwan are worth monitoring not just in their own right but also for their broader regional implications. Barring a serious economic slowdown, outbound Chinese tourism will continue to be of major political and social consequence for the region. Parallel with visible discontent about other aspects of Beijing’s rule that exploded in the Umbrella Movement protests of late 2014, residents of Hong Kong continue taking to the streets and malls to demonstrate against Chinese tourists, holding signs and chanting against the so-called “locust” hordes of shoppers (Garrett 2016). In Vietnam, locals have long complained about Chinese tourists (Chan 2006), and following May 2014 riots that were triggered by the placement of a Chinese oil rig in Vietnam-claimed waters in the South China Sea, anti-Chinese sentiment has escalated. Similar tensions are now apparent in Korea’s Jeju Island (Choe 2015). In a time of growing Chinese mobility and in a region under the shadow of an increasingly assertive state regime willing to experiment with various sovereign formulations, the political instrumentality and unpredictability of tourism mobilities will likely spawn even more kinds of exceptional spaces.

Beyond the contingent particulars of this region, the mutual constitution of tourism mobilities and exceptional spaces is terrain for fresh research. Passports and visa

regimes, borders and bordering practices, and international currency and trade controls are concerns of anthropologists, geographers, and political theorists, among others. Study of the uses of exceptional spaces in the facilitation of tourism should proceed in a reciprocal direction as well, to include analysis of the role of tourism mobilities in the pursuit of wider political projects.

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