

First intermediary report



**Developing a high value added tourism in
the Tibetan areas through education,
branding and coordinated marketing**

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Executive summary

In the 1980s, the Chinese government has started to develop tourism in the Tibetan areas, thus introducing an economic activity which did not exist in the region before. In past centuries, the only travelers in this area were pilgrims and traders. Pilgrims were often poor and were not considered to be a potential source of income; traders had quite often official authorizations for requesting pack and riding animals and were therefore much more of a strain on the local economy than a blessing.

Tourism has progressively become an important sector of the Tibetan economy. However, so far, it has been limited mainly to the following fields:

- cultural and religious tourism related to the Tibetan monastic system
- high-level trekking and mountain climbing
- sight-seeing of monasteries and landscapes (essentially Chinese tourists)



Figure 1: Chinese tourist taking a picture of a religious ceremony.

The Tibetan landscape and culture allow another kind of tourism which could present a huge potential, but has not been tapped yet: many regions in the Tibetan areas offer soft mountains, where the Tibetans love to have fun. This is quite similar to the way Western people in the Alps, Scandinavia and many parts of the USA and Australia enjoy their own mountains and let tourists enjoy them. Bringing tourists used to this kind of tourism to the Tibetan areas could not only help the region develop economically; it could also initiate a cultural dialogue which would improve mutual understanding. The Swiss Valais region has developed an interesting model for providing a wide range of activities which are further valued through branding and coordinated marketing. The experience of Swiss mountain resorts with demanding tourists from all over the world can certainly help the Tibetan areas to expand their offer.

The socio-economic context in the Tibetan countryside has changed dramatically over the recent years: the conjunction of policies favorable to the rural economy and the rise in food prices has led to the accumulation of capital and the emergence of a local class of businessmen active in trade and tourism.

However, these entrepreneurs do not have much experience in tourism. As a result, this sector is extremely fragmented, without connections to the national and international distribution system. Language issues are also a huge problem when communicating with Han Chinese and even more with foreign tourists. The offer of tourism activities is also quite poor. A last weak point in the Tibetan tourism offer is the food issue. The

problem is not so much that the tourists don't like the food the Tibetans like. Even many Tibetans don't really like Tibetan food and prefer the famous Chinese Sichuan cuisine or Moslem Hui food.

This project will try to work out solutions to these problems, in order to make the Tibetan tourism industry more competitive and attractive. Especially for the problems related to the use of information technology (or its absence) and language skills, tools will be elaborated and tested. Concrete examples of sports activities and dishes will be tested and documented. Branding, certification and marketing associations will be set up. This project will not only lead to a better understanding of the situation, it will also put concrete solutions into the hands of local entrepreneurs.

Outline of the research project

The purpose of the research project presented here is to test a few hypotheses about possible measures to assist the local people with the development of a sustainable tourism industry in the Tibetan areas. The present document is the first intermediary report written after two stays of 2-3 weeks of the author in that region. It should therefore be considered as temporary and subject to multiple revisions.

The various actors involved

The initiator of the project is Otto Kölbl. He is a researcher and PhD student at the German Department of the University of Lausanne. The topic of his PhD (in progress) is Western media reporting about China. He is also the person in charge of the exams at the Goethe-Institut Examinations Center of that same university and has a long experience with teaching foreign languages in Switzerland and China. He has worked for many years for a company developing business administration software, where he was in charge of software development, website design and customer relations.

The following people have contributed to the brainstorming leading to the present document and are willing to contribute through advice and/or active collaboration to its future progress (in alphabetic order):

Bruno Huggler, acting president of Valais Tourisme, the officially recognized federation of all the tourism offices of the Valais province in Switzerland.

Prof. Christine Demen Meier from the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, partner to the University of Lausanne. Her specialty is the management of small and medium sized enterprises in the field of tourism.

Gao Zhaoyu, master in public administration from the Renmin University in Beijing, now assistant and PhD student at the IDHEAP, an institute specialized in public administration associated with the University of Lausanne

Marc Laperrouza, lecturer and research fellow at the University of Lausanne, lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne, senior adviser at the IMD, specialist of the Chinese economy.

Tristan Loloum, assistant and PhD student at the Institut Universitaire Kurt Bosch in Sion, which is active in research in tourism and has got extensive contacts with China in this field.

Prof. Harro Von Senger, professor of law at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law Lausanne and professor of sinology at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

Timetable

The following steps are planned within the project; they depend of course on the availability of financing and of the authorization by the Chinese authorities:

Spring 2013	Application for funding for the project
Summer 2013 and/or 2014	Stays by Otto Kölbl of 7-8 weeks each in the Tibetan areas in order to realize the pilot projects outlined in the present document; visit to the Tibetan areas by various Swiss specialists
End 2013 or beginning 2014	Publication of a book about Tibet: past, present and outlook for the future

From autumn 2013 on	Development of the necessary marketing tools: branding and certification design; information, booking and billing website; training of local professionals to the use of these tools
From summer 2014 on	Arrival in the Tibetan areas of the first tourists channeled through the tools developed within the framework of this project

The Chinese context: recent economic development in the countryside

After the 1990ies where economic development benefited mainly the coastal cities, recent years have seen fast development in the Chinese countryside. Last year has seen the first reduction in the income gap between cities and the countryside since the mid-1980ies. Most of the measures which have led to this development are part of the policy called "harmonious society". For a detailed description of this process, the related policy changes and the impact on the Tibetan areas, see the text *A community-based model of development with Tibetan characteristics*.

Recent development in Tibetan areas

The policies which have led to this fast economic development have also been applied in the Tibetan areas. The result was the emergence of a class of Tibetan entrepreneurs, who have set up businesses in trade and tourism. With the beginning of the economic reforms of the 1980ies, the Tibetan areas experienced an economic boom based mainly on agricultural production. Already at that time, tourism was recognized as a potential income source for the area, but it took off quite slowly. This field and the trade generated by the development of agriculture were mainly in the hand of Han and Hui entrepreneurs.

However, the last years have seen a sharp increase in the number of Tibetan entrepreneurs; this is due to a combination of factors:

- the above mentioned policy of "harmonious society", i.e. targeted support for the countryside and remote areas
- the recent rise in food prices, leading to an accumulation of capital by Tibetan farmers and herders
- a better education level among the Tibetan population, including a better mastery of the Chinese language
- the slow emergence of a "business culture" in the local population
- An improved transport infrastructure which lead to an increase in mobility

Many local entrepreneurs have started as salesmen in big cities, before coming back to their home region to set up a small shop with the help of the local administration. The income generated in this way allowed them to progressively expand their activities to more capital-intensive activities. The long-standing tradition of trading in natural products like medicinal herbs has certainly contributed to this process.

The fast growth of tourism in recent years has directed this activity in part towards this promising sector. In the Tibetan areas, like in the rest of China, most of the recent growth has been driven by Chinese tourists. Chinese consumers, especially in the coastal regions, have experienced a much faster growth in their income than Western consumers. This has led all over China to a fast growth of the tourism industry.

The characteristics of Chinese tourism in Tibetan areas

Chinese tourism is mostly oriented on sightseeing. This means that only places with famous scenic spots or interesting monuments like major monasteries can benefit from it. One of the major assets of the Tibetan areas is its mountains. However, the Han Chinese need monumental stairs to climb mountains. There are some attempts to build stairs which lead up to Tibetan mountain tops, but the result is less than impressive:



Figure 2: Monumental stairs leading up to the hills above Baoji, Shaanxi province



Figure 3: Wooden stairs leading up to a hilltop close to a Tibetan tourism resort

Since Chinese tourists will seldom venture very far from the place where the bus left them, there are little chances that local farmers and herders can benefit directly from tourist activities. Anyway, direct contact with local people who live in remote places is made difficult by their limited Chinese language mastery.

On the other hand, Chinese tourists have contributed a lot to developing the tourism infrastructure in a great number of places. Chinese economic growth will presumably go on over the next decades with near certainty; the number of tourists will increase accordingly. However, we can expect the Chinese society to evolve from today's work-centered society to a leisure society. It is difficult to evaluate what consequences this will have on the behavior of tourists in Tibet, but we can predict a more positive relationship with nature. This would bring the preferences of Chinese tourists much closer to the characteristics of Western tourists at least in some points. More and more Chinese enjoy the Western style of mountain and ski resort tourism. They would certainly appreciate if they could get something similar close to home.



Figure 4: A small souvenir shop selling religious artifacts and handicraft mainly to tourists.

Another issue which is becoming more and more important in China is the issue of branding. Food safety is a good example. Many Chinese don't trust the highly productive lowland agriculture and look for alternatives. However, buying organically grown products is always a question of trust: you cannot know from just looking at the product how many chemical pesticides and fertilizer were used to grow it. The

same is true for other aspects of tourism: is a small souvenir really made by local farmers, or has it been mass-produced in factories in the Chinese lowland? What is the comfort and hygiene standard offered by a hotel booked online? Branding and certification organizations can help to introduce reliable quality standards into the tourism industry.

The characteristics of Western tourism in mountainous regions

Switzerland and many other Western countries have got a long tradition in mountain tourism. This tourism has evolved significantly over the last decades. In the 19th century, the first tourists in Switzerland were wealthy Englishmen who considered the highest summits of the Alps as challenges. Progressively, the clients of Swiss tourism resorts became more and more interested in "fun tourism". The prototype of "fun tourism" was of course skiing, but ice skating, mountain bike and horse riding, quads, rafting and motor bikes are playing a more and more prominent role.

Especially in regions like the West of the USA, Canada, Scandinavia and Australia, these activities have always been supplemented by trekking and camping. Even though trekkers have always sought a close relation with nature, some infrastructure is required.

When Western tourists travel to other continents to engage in trekking, the required infrastructure becomes even more important. This kind of tourism has developed into a lucrative industry in such places as the South-American rainforests, the Indian Himalayas and the Australian Outback. "Local tourists" know about the dangers of nature and certain basic rules to be respected, whereas Western tourists who travel to tropical areas need precise information, guides, organized means of transport etc.

Language issues are of course a major issue. In many regions of the world, it is not easy for tourists to find people who speak English. Many tourists do not even speak English; they would need help in French, Spanish, German, Italian or many other languages. As a result, they might hesitate to leave the tourist resort without a qualified guide. Contacts with the local population are therefore almost impossible.

The Valais province in Switzerland has set up a dense network of infrastructure and customer information services. New activities are introduced on a regular basis. Whatever happens, trained mountain rescue teams are on standby around the clock. The original offer based on skiing has been broadened to other mountain sports, wellness and cultural activities. Local food specialties like wine, cheese and dried meat have been transformed into a major marketing argument.

The Tibetan assets in the field of tourism and how to realize their potential

This section provides a list of assets, which will of course be completed during the research project. Assets are included in this list no matter whether they are already exploited to some extent or whether they are still pure potential. The measures to exploit the potential of these assets should be considered as hypotheses waiting for validation through further fieldtrips.

Tibetan Buddhism and the monastic system

No matter whether Westerner or Chinese, if you ask potential tourists what comes to their mind when they think about Tibet, most will immediately answer: Tibetan Buddhism and the related monasteries. Many tourists will travel to Tibet only for its monasteries, some for a short time, some will stay for a long time to learn Tibetan and get a thorough introduction to this religion.

This is nothing new. Already during the 1930s, Tibetan Buddhism was very popular among Han Chinese Buddhists. This phenomenon was triggered by the presence of the Panchen Lama and other high-ranking incarnate lamas in Chinese-controlled Tibetan areas. During the period of Mao Zedong, this trend was brought to a halt, but it reemerged progressively after the beginning of the reforms in the 1980s.



Figure 5: Lhamo Kirti / Langmusi Geerdengsi monastery in Sichuan province.

Some Han Chinese consider that only Tibetan Buddhism allows them to find the spiritual roots of their civilization. Many more Han Chinese travel to Tibet not only to pray in Tibetan monasteries, but also for sightseeing and adventure. Among Han Chinese, combining tourism with trips to Buddhist sanctuaries all over China has got a long tradition.



Figure 6: Tourists praying and taking pictures at the Baimasi monastery close to Luoyang, Henan province

Tibetan monasteries have got quite a positive attitude towards tourists; they consider that it is their duty to provide some spirituality to a materialistic world. The major obstacle to this kind of relationship is quite often the language problem. In all monasteries there are monks who speak Chinese well, but other foreign language skills are quite rare. In a few monasteries, some monks learn English so that they are able to work

as competent tourist guides within the monastery, but such initiatives are not very widespread. Another asset of the monasteries is their control over many cultural events which are in some way related to Buddhism, in particular religious dance festivals.



Figure 7: Religious dance in a monastery in Gansu province (Amdo region)

Improving the offer of foreign language guides in the monasteries can certainly contribute to a better use of the tourism potential, but one thing should be clear: the number of Western tourists who will travel to the Tibetan areas only for Tibetan Buddhism is very limited. In China, no matter whether among Han, Hui, Tibetans or other cultures, travelling with a religious destination in mind is very widespread. In the West, this kind of tourism is quite marginal. Therefore, the other assets listed below will play a capital role in attracting more tourists to Tibet.

Landscape and mountains

Whereas Western popular beliefs about Tibet are quite correct about Tibetan Buddhism and monasteries (they are indeed very important in Tibetan society), they are dead wrong about the Tibetan mountains. The clichés carried by the Western media focus on the fierce mountains of the Himalaya range. This is quite opposed to the image presented to the Chinese in the news, documentaries and folk song video clips where the accent is put on the high plains. Of course there are high inaccessible mountains in Tibet, but the huge majority of the Tibetan territory is made of high plains and softly sloped hills and mountains.

This widens considerably the potential target client population. The abrupt mountains of the Himalaya range require specialized skills and a lot of preparatory training if you want to get anything out of them. The kind of landscape which you will find in most of the Tibetan areas, on the contrary, is accessible to most people who have got a moderately good physical condition.



Figure 8: Gentle slopes above the high plateau in Sichuan province Amdo region

However, exploiting this potential requires some software and hardware infrastructure. We are not talking about multi-billion investments like what is necessary to equip a modern Western ski resort. In most parts of the Tibetan areas, the winters are extremely dry and there is never enough snow for skiing. Anyway, ski tourism is an extremely competitive field with small profit margins: many Eastern European countries have invested heavily in the infrastructure and they have got the necessary natural climate. The Sochi Olympic Winter Games 2014 are a good example of such projects.

What is needed in Tibet would be hiking trails or at least some markers or signs and maps which tourists can use to find their way. Reading a topographic map on paper is not easy; modern applications on smart phones combining topographic information with GPS data can be a solution. Of course, hiking trails must be tested, documented and the relevant information entered in the relevant application.

Right now, even in touristic spots in the Tibetan areas, it is not easy to go on a tour in the mountains without having to hire a guide. Existing hiking trails are generally short and lead to special "scenic spots"; they can be pretty overcrowded in summer. They are adapted to Han tourism but not to Western tourists, who are used to have a large choice of short and long hiking trails where they can enjoy the wide nature without meeting other tourists every ten minutes and without a local guide. As mentioned above, this kind of tourism will certainly become more and more popular among Han Chinese.

Such hiking can be a valuable income source for nomads. In the Swiss mountains, restaurants or farmhouses high up in the mountains provide food for hikers; Western tourists are also used to take sandwiches when they go on a tour. In the Tibetan areas, this is quite complicated: it is not easy to find food you can easily take with you, since meals are generally served hot.

Tibetans are very hospitable and would be happy to welcome tourists who happen to be hungry, but information on both sides is necessary to avoid misunderstandings. It does not really make sense if Western tourists get food for free, but local people might be reluctant to ask for money. Training for local nomads could include some basic English or some communication help like some kind of "menu" with standard prices. Tourists should be informed about the possibility to get some food from local nomads and

about the geographic availability of this offer: at some times in the year, there might simply be no nomads in certain areas.

Other outdoor activities require more hardware. Mountain biking is a typical entry level mechanized outdoor activity. None of my friends in China have ever mentioned this sport. Mountain bikes can be easily found in China, but they are not used to go cross country. When looking for "mountain bike Tibet" on Google Images, you get almost exclusively photographs of well-trained bike fanatics who drive their bikes over thousands of kilometers crossing high mountain passes. If you perform the same search for "mountain bike" without specifying "Tibet", the picture is quite different: most photographs show downhill mountain biking, which requires less effort and is much more "fun". For mountain biking to become a popular tourism activity in the thin air of Tibet, a way of bringing the tourists up to the mountain top is certainly required. This does not require expensive cable cars; busses, vans, cars or even motorbikes driven by local nomads can do this, depending on the availability of roads. This activity can certainly be attractive to Western and Chinese tourists alike.

Downhill scooters have got the advantage over mountain bikes that they are easier to transport uphill. They are a quite recent sport in Europe, many people never heard about it. They were developed by ski resorts as an alternative to traditional winter sport when there is no snow, which is more and more often the case due to climate warming. The "novelty factor" could make this sport more attractive. On the other hand, everybody who can ride on a bike can use a downhill scooter.



Figure 9: Downhill scooters are a new tourist attraction in many Western mountain resorts

Another variant includes the use of dogs for pulling the scooters. Strong dogs are available on a large scale in the Tibetan areas; they are used for herding the sheep and yaks and to protect them against wolves. They could probably easily be trained to pull scooters with tourists.



Figure 10: Using dogs to pull scooters is an alternative to riding them downhill

Some scooters come with a gasoline or electric engine, which makes them "up and downhill scooters". In the USA, they cost below USD 500.- on the retail market; in China (where they are produced), they are

certainly much cheaper. They can get to the mountain top with their own power; for riding them downhill, they come with a neutral gear.



Figure 11: Scooters with electric and gasoline motor

Quads are becoming more and more popular in Western countries. Unlike motorbikes, especially the ones with foot gear, quads don't require a long learning process. They are therefore a very popular vehicle for outdoor fun. Especially in regions with little snowfall like most of the Tibetan areas, they can be used even in winter. On the other hand, quads are quite expensive and most Tibetans have certainly never heard about them. On the contrary, motorbikes are in common use in Tibet, on the roads as well as cross-country. They are a necessary working tool, especially for herders.



Figure 12: Quads can be a convenient vehicle in mountainous areas, even for children or people without driving license

Proposing tourism cross-country activities based on quads and motorbikes in Tibet might look like heresy to most Westerners. Using motorized vehicles for this should certainly be banned close to cities, villages and in hiking regions, but Tibet is so hugely vast that quad or motorbike tours will not be a problem in most areas. Provided that their power is limited, the damage they do to the grass is negligible as compared to what a grazing yak does. When tourists use vehicles in the same way as local herders do it on a daily basis, this should be considered as acceptable. Ecological considerations are discussed more in detail below in the section Ecologically sustainable tourism.

Especially in the case of motorbikes, there is another reason to promote this activity for tourists. The Tibetan herders are very proud of their motorbikes and their driving skills. The best way of building up a real relationship between tourists and local people is to have them share a common activity. Setting up motor biking activities could be a way of bringing them together even if verbal communication is difficult. Sport has always been an excellent way of bridging continents and cultures. Like this, the first Chinese taking part on a motorbike in the Paris Dakar rally could be a Tibetan.

Another activity for which Tibet is well-known in China is horse-riding. Before motorbikes became popular in the Tibetan areas, horses were the main transport vehicle. Horse races and other sports involving horse riding are an important part of Tibetan culture. Tours on horseback for tourists are available in many places. The problem with this activity is that the huge majority of tourists haven't got any skills in horse riding. Their role is therefore purely passive: they are put on the back of a horse and carried around through the landscape like babies. For most tourists, horse-riding is therefore only an interesting activity for a short moment. On the other hand, horse-riding is becoming more and more popular as a sport in Western countries. Like motor biking, this activity can also become a contact point between local people and tourists.



Figure 13: Tibetan herders converging to a bus to load the tourists onto their horses.

The major problem in the way of promoting "fun tourism" in the Tibetan areas is the image of the region in the Western media. Their reporting focuses almost exclusively on the monastic system. The Tibetan semi-nomadic herders are only mentioned in Western news reports in relation to their "forced sedentarisation". People getting their information from Western media would never imagine that in the Tibetan areas, there is a thriving semi-nomadic herder society where families move from pasture to pasture in summer and live in houses with (almost) modern comfort during the harsh winter months.

As for motor biking tourism, the Western media image is even more problematic. The Tibetans are always described as a people living according to century-old traditions who try to fend off modernity which is said to be imposed on them by the Han Chinese. That many Tibetans love their motorbike is of course in stark contradiction to this cliché and is therefore never mentioned.

Some other typical Western mountain sports could also be considered for introduction into the Tibetan areas. Canoeing, kayaking and especially rafting have become popular sports in the US and to some extent in Europe. Some Tibetan tour operators already propose rafting on the Yellow River to Western tourists. I have heard that such activities are also proposed in the Chinese lowlands in some places. Proposing them in the Tibetan areas would of course require careful training of the people in charge in order to ensure maximum security. Rafting was common in Tibet in past centuries as a means of transport, but since the introduction of road transport this tradition has been lost.

Rock climbing on natural or semi-artificial outdoor climbing walls could also be introduced to Tibet, with the same precaution: local guides would have to be trained before this activity can be proposed to tourists. Obviously, professional guides in the Himalaya range do not need any such training; but in the high plain areas, there are adequate walls for this sport, but the local people do not know this activity.

Security is of course one of the major problems with all mountain activities. Western tourists accept that some activities are associated with a certain risk; but in case of an accident, rescuers are expected to arrive quickly and transport the victims with proper medical care to the closest hospital. Mountain rescue operations would have to be organized and rehearsed.

Of course, the organizers of such activities are expected to inform about the safety risks and to hand out the necessary protective gear. Depending on the sport and the environment, it might include at least helmets, but also gloves, knee and elbow pads, sometimes even complete body armors.

In some places in the Tibetan areas, officials from the Public Security Bureau are in charge of guaranteeing the safety of foreign tourists. If something happens to the latter, they might lose their job. Having people in charge of planning security is of course something very positive. Protective gear and rehearsing rescue operations is costly and time-consuming; without supervision, security tends to be neglected. However, we know that tourists do stupid things, and firing an official every time a tourist gets hurt or dies would be a severe obstacle to the development of the above-mentioned activities. Adequate regulations should make sure that these officials do not have to fear for their job each time they see a mountain biker speeding down a slope at break-neck speed.

Nature and health

All over the world, mountain regions are known to have a pure air, clean water and no pollutants in the food. Sanatoria where the rich went to get cured from tuberculosis and other illnesses have played an important role in the development of Swiss mountain resorts in the 19th century. Thermal sources played a similar role for skin and other problems.

Nowadays, pure air and hot water alone are not enough to attract the tourists in a more and more competitive market. "Wellness" is the new key concept. It requires an integrated service offer from hiking paths over personalized fitness training and thermal pools to spiritual counseling. Switzerland and India have built up a solid reputation in this market which is based on their longstanding tradition in holistic treatment. China has got an excellent reputation for its traditional medicine; Chinese doctors are in high demand in Western countries. However, because of its fast industrialization in the past decades, it has not been able to profile itself as a tourism destination in this field.

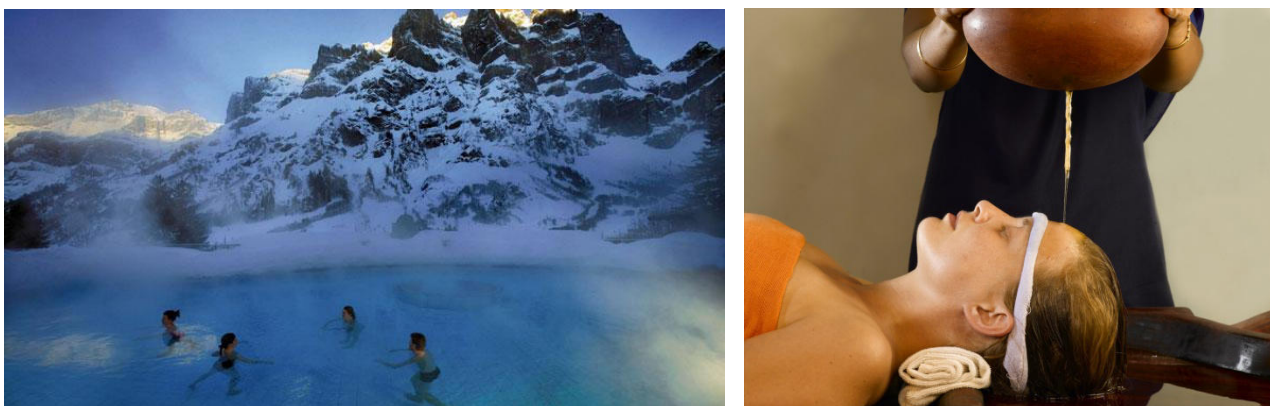


Figure 14: Switzerland with its mountain tourism and India with its traditional medicine have built up a solid reputation on the wellness market

The Tibetan areas could easily combine the Swiss kind of wellness based on mountains and nature with the Indian tradition based on a spiritual approach to health and healing. The Tibetan traditional medicine has always been based in the monasteries. The monks can therefore naturally offer a combination of physical treatment and spiritual guidance. Tibet has always provided lowland China with high quality medical herbs. However, as far as I know, there has never been any attempt to offer an integrated facility with high standard living quarters, medical treatment, thermal bath, fitness, outdoor activities, high quality food and spiritual guidance. The various actors involved in these services are not used to cooperating. Achieving this integration will certainly be a major challenge.

Agriculture

Tibetan farmers and herders have been used for centuries to market their agricultural products in exchange for industrial products from the lowland. On the other hand, they are not used to marketing their agricultural activities or their image. The Valais province in Switzerland, on the contrary, has based part of its image on its products. This means not only selling high quality products, but also cultivating the image of

the farmers who produce them. Branding and quality labels are a vital component of this process (see below).



Figure 15: Meat produced on the plateau by Tibetan herders is in high demand.

Agriculture has got much more to offer than only the products. For many people, the production process has its own value. For many decades, "back to nature" has been a slogan in Western countries; in China, it becomes more and more prominent. Holidays in a farmhouse have always been a popular holiday destination in many countries, especially in Northern Europe, the USA and Australia. In China, many urban residents have got family members in the countryside; paying them a visit is a popular pastime for weekends and holidays. Of course, travelling to the countryside where they know nobody might also remind them of the Cultural Revolution, but the recent increase in Mao's popularity could boost this new way of spending the holidays. The Tibetan areas have got much to offer in this field: spending such holidays on horseback in the Tibetan highlands is obviously more attractive than doing it in muddy rice fields.

There is one Tibetan agricultural product which has a huge potential, but which is totally unknown in Western countries: Tibetan honey. Honey bees have had a hard time in many Western countries; in recent years, many hives have suddenly died for reasons which are still a mystery; many experts point to powerful new pesticides as a possible cause.

Honey produced in Western countries is also problematic because of the huge quantities of pesticides and other chemical products used in agriculture. Some people recommend using honey produced in big cities like Paris: they say that despite the heavy pollution, the honey produced there is still less contaminated by chemical products than the honey produced in the countryside.

Honey is already produced in many Tibetan areas, but it is not sold in Western countries. Honey can easily be transported over great distances and it can get a very good price in highly industrialized countries. What is more, it is relatively easy through pollen analysis to authenticate the origin of the honey. This product can become a major source of income for local farmers.

Food

China has always had an extremely refined cuisine renowned all over the world. However, in recent years, attention has been more and more focused on the origin of the products and there is a trend towards countryside cuisine. In hill or mountain regions close to major cities, restaurants sell local food cooked with local ingredients at sometimes horrendous prices.

On the other hand, I have heard only negative comments from Han Chinese who have travelled to Tibetan areas and tried the local food. There are some Tibetan specialties which are highly appreciated by Tibetans, but many of them do not value most of the Tibetan cuisine; they prefer Han or Hui food. What is more, Tibetans do not have any tradition of going out to eat in restaurants. However, I have heard some positive comments by Western tourists, and I can only confirm that the Tibetan cuisine is very similar in some aspects to the cuisine from the Alpine region or from Northern Europe.



Figure 16: The owner of this restaurant learned how to cook "shaguo" and dumplings in a Han Chinese restaurant and serves this food now "with Tibetan characteristics" in her own restaurant.

Promoting Tibetan cuisine will certainly require some "hybridization". It is well known that when the cuisine of a certain country is exported to another region, it will often change in order to adapt to the local customs. This process has already started for centuries in some Tibetan areas: the cuisine in Amdo and Kham is heavily influenced by Hui, Sichuan and Indian cuisine. Tibetans from these regions tend to have quite a low opinion of the Lhasa cuisine which has not gone through this process of hybridization.

In recent times, Tibetan restaurants have opened in some places. They tend to be quite expensive, but they are highly appreciated by upper-class Tibetans and by some tourists. Such trends should be supported by active "hybridization development". If Tibetans learn to cook Chinese food with Tibetan characteristics for their own consumption as well as Tibetan food with Chinese characteristic and with Western characteristics for tourists, this could become a substantial source of income and make the Tibetan areas more attractive to lowland Chinese and foreigners.

Another problem to be addressed is the lack of food which tourists can take away when they want to go hiking all day. Except for Tsampa (the Tibetan staple food made of barley flour, butter and water), most dishes are eaten hot. Farmers eat mantou (Han style steamed bread) with butter and smoked meat, but this is not easily available for tourists. Especially Western tourists are used to take their own food when they go hiking, and they are generally used neither to Tibetan food nor to Chinese food. Developing some kind of Tibet Burger and making it available all over the Tibetan areas could solve this problem.

Here again, I hear some people shout "heresy". However, there are some interesting precedents. In Xi'an, the "Xi'an hamburger" is available all over the city from street vendors. In its structure, it is somewhat similar to Western hamburgers, but it is through and through a Chinese product with ingredients you would not imagine in an "original" hamburger and notably with a high proportion of vegetables. Some people told me that it had a tradition of 2000 years; others told me that it was definitely inspired by its Western homonym. Anyway, the best "Western-style" hamburgers I have ever eaten were "made in China": since the Chinese are used to eating spiced and tasty food, the Western brands adapted their recipes and, at least in my opinion, improved it considerably. I am sure that Tibetan ingredients and spices can equally contribute to improve this product which has become part of world heritage.

The Tibetan "popular culture"

As mentioned above, the monasteries are the guardians of most aspects of Tibetan culture. However, there are two aspects of it which are not related to religion: the "picnic culture" and events featuring horse racing and other sports related with horses.



Figure 17: Three families having a picnic on a hill above a Tibetan town.

Festivals related to horse riding feature in many Western documentaries about the Tibetan areas. The danger of "folklorization" is of course real if tourism increases notably in the region. Maybe Western riders taking part in these activities could contribute to setting up a real intercultural dialogue. In the Swiss Valais province, a somewhat similar traditional event has become an important part of the local culture, but also of marketing and tourism of the whole region. The event is called "Combats de reine" (literally "Fighting queens") and features female cows fighting for supremacy within the flock before ascending to the summer pastures. The experience acquired with handling this event in a highly touristic environment could be of use to Tibetan tourism experts.



Figure 18: The female cow fights called "combats de reines" have become an important event in the Swiss Alps Valais region.

Picnics are of course less contentious. However, their potential for tourism should not be underestimated. In Western countries, meals taken outside play an important role in society. For Western tourists, a meal taken in the middle of the Tibetan mountains can be an unforgettable moment. However, preparing it themselves is not easy since they will not find the food they usually eat in the local supermarkets. Local companies could offer this service, if possible adapted to the taste of the tourists. The present research project could put the necessary information at the disposal of the Tibetan tourism sector.

Infrastructure

Transport, energy and communication infrastructure are definitely an important factor in the development of tourism in remote areas. In this field, not many problems are to be expected in the Tibetan areas. The Chinese authorities have invested heavily into this sector, as is the case in other Chinese regions. However, an inventory of roads, the offer of public transport and the availability of mobile phone/3G coverage will be established for the various Tibetan regions.

The hotel infrastructure is of course extremely important for tourism. In most Chinese regions, there are only two types of hotels: huge expensive hotels and small cheap ones. For local entrepreneurs in the Tibetan areas, building huge luxury hotels is not easy. In Western countries, there are also smaller high standard hotels. Especially in regions where land prices are relatively low, bungalow resorts are very popular. Many Western tourists prefer staying in an individual bungalow rather than in a crowded hotel.



Figure 19: A Tibetan monastery with individual houses for the monks

Tibetan architecture is based mainly on small individual houses. In Western monasteries, the monks live in rooms in multistoried buildings and take their meals together. In Tibetan monasteries, on the contrary, monks generally have their own house or share a house with a few fellow monks; they will also cook their own food. This traditional housing mode is very popular with tourists from highly industrialized regions, where everybody dreams of a small house in the middle of nature, but very few can afford this dream.

In narrow valleys, land is scarce. However, these regions are not necessarily adapted to the kind of high value added tourism outlined here. Living in a narrow valley is often considered to be a little depressing. One of the most valuable assets of the Tibetan areas is the vast high plateau. In these places, land is cheap and there is plenty of it. Building bungalow style tourism resorts in the traditional Tibetan style can become an interesting alternative to hotels and is certainly adapted to the possibilities of the local entrepreneurs: such resorts can easily be extended by adding more bungalows.

Marketing tourism to the Tibetan areas

Some hotels in the Tibetan areas are already connected to the national or (in some cases) international tourism industry. On the other side, many hotels still find their clients by simply calling them when they pass by in the street. Many small hotels haven't even got a computer. This illustrates the need for improved marketing.

Coordinating all the actors

The Tibetan society is extremely fragmented. Large family clans have always determined the structure of Tibetan society, and now they play an important role in the development of local businesses. However, developing tourism will require integrated coordination of all the actors involved across the whole Tibetan areas.

The easiest way of achieving this is setting up a federation which provides certain services, like an online information, booking and billing website. Such a tool is certainly necessary for small hotels and tour operators to be able to provide an attractive integrated concept to the tourists. Developing it is one of the objectives of the present project.

However, simply setting up such a service provider would not result in real coordination. Collaboration in the tourism sector requires the building up of mutual trust among all the actors involved. In the Western tourism industry, even major players with a turnover of billions of dollars will collaborate in order to fill their cruise ships and charter flights. It is generally recognized that especially small and medium size enterprises must collaborate if they want to have a chance against the big players. Local entrepreneurs

must realize that they are not in competition against the hotel next doors, but against powerful multinational tourism companies all over the world.

Marketing the Tibetan image: branding and quality labels

The quest for authenticity is becoming more and more important in the West as well as in all of China. Tourists want to get "the real thing", but how can they know that the meat they are eating is real Tibetan yak or lamb, that the honey has been collected on the Tibetan high plateau and not in areas with intensive agriculture, and that the milk has been produced locally, but with modern hygiene standards? The modern solution to this problem is branding and certification.

Certification through quality labels is quite flexible and does not require much capital or other means. A typical example is organically grown agricultural products, which are certified in European countries by independent organizations. Quality labels are also used in the tourism industry; the Valais province for example has set up the "Valais excellence" quality label. At the end of 2011, 107 companies were already certified. The certification process for this label is standardized under the ISO 9001 and 14001 norm and according to many other criteria ensuring a sustainable development of the region.

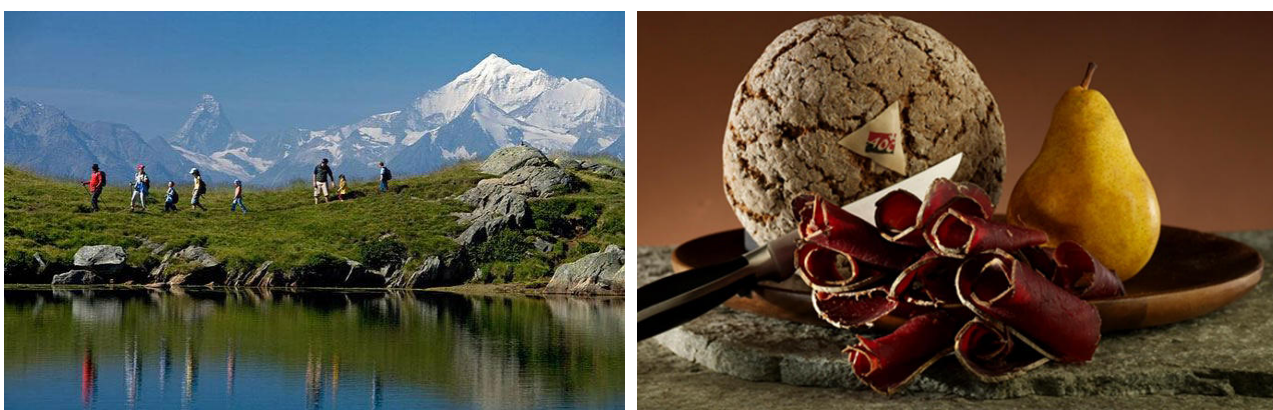


Figure 20: The Valais province in Switzerland has based the promotion of the region on outdoor activities and natural food.

A brand is generally considered to be linked to one company, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. In the Valais province, the "Valais" brand has been created for individual products. At the end of 2011, 27 products produced by many different companies have been granted the right to be marketed under this brand.

Another aspect of this issue is the Western trend towards "moralizing trade". The idea is that the consumers want to know where "their money goes". In order to alleviate their feeling of guilt caused by their unrestrained consumerism, they want to make sure that the money they spend supports a "good cause" while still getting value for their money. The "good cause" in this case would obviously be to support an ecologically and socially sustainable development of the local economy. This would have to be one of the main arguments behind any label or brand used for Tibetan tourism.

Another argument would be related to the bad image of big multinational companies. "Big capital" has always been a bad word for most people, in the Western capitalist society as well as in communist China. On the other hand, the companies selling trips and dreams to Western and Chinese consumers are of course an integral part of "big capital". For them, proposing a form of tourism which supports small businesses with the corresponding "human touch" and which allows the tourists to be part of it for a couple of weeks is a blessing.

It is quite obvious that certification and branding require a close collaboration and the strict enforcement of rules with regular controls. On the other hand, the benefits are obvious: local entrepreneurs cannot invest into advertisement in the international media or build up direct relations with international business distributors. Once such a brand or label is set up, promoting it will have a direct incidence on all the small businesses which are part of it and on all the tour operators which sell it.

Projecting an image of Tibet which will make tourists feel comfortable

Promotion of tourism to Tibet should not insist too heavily on the "uniqueness" of the region. Projecting the image of a region where everything is different is good for letting the people dream, but it will not motivate them to travel there. This is especially important when targeting Western customers, since there is already a well-established tradition of Han Chinese tourism to Tibetan areas.

Western Tibet specialists and the Western media tend to amplify the "cultural distance" which separates the Western cultures and the Tibetan areas. They are certainly motivated to do so by the wish to profile themselves as indispensable for any contact with people who communicate in a way which is so different from ours.

I have always been amazed by the impressive cultural differences which can be found in such a small region as Western Europe or within one single country like China; in comparison, the "global" cultural distance between for example Western Europe and China is comparatively minor. It is quite interesting to see that Westerners who travel to China without any "cultural preparation" will easily make contacts with local people and can often get a deep understanding of local life. On the other hand, "China specialists" who have studied sinology at Western universities and have spent their lives trying to understand the "Chinese culture" tend to write things about China which most Chinese find outraging.

The "cultural differences" you can find between lowland Chinese and Tibetans is in many ways similar to the cultural difference between Europeans from highly industrialized and densely populated areas and people living in remote mountainous areas. On the other hand, there are amazing similarities between Western mountainous areas and the Tibetan culture.

Pointing out such similarities in the Western media can certainly push consumers who have enjoyed their stay in Western mountain resorts to venture out to a trip to the Tibetan areas. Collaboration in various areas like the development of tourism or sports which have got a longstanding tradition in the Tibetan areas could contribute to this undertaking.

Food and housing are of course main preoccupations of potential tourists. The interior of traditional Tibetan farmhouses is amazingly almost identical to the Alpine "chalet style". Making Westerners feel that they will arrive in an environment which is basically very familiar because similar to what they can find in the Swiss Alps can certainly contribute to reducing the reputation of Tibet as a "destination for the most courageous only". In the same way, showing all the Tibetan food which is so similar or even identical to what we are used to eat in Western countries can alleviate the fear of having to choose between starving to death or eating only Tibet burgers for weeks on end.



Figure 21: Only minor details distinguish this traditional Tibetan living room from a typical Swiss alpine chalet.

Working with the Western media

The biggest problem for developing Western tourism to the Tibetan areas is of course the past Western media reporting about the region. The well-known saying "Only bad news is good news" might be true for the balance sheet of the media conglomerates; a barrage fire of bad news about the Tibetan region is bad news for the economic development of the local people, and ultimately also for the preservation of their

language, culture and religion. The future will show to what extent the Western media are willing to play a constructive role in the buildup of a solid locally controlled economy in the Tibetan areas.

Developing a sustainable tourism

"Sustainability" has become an important keyword used especially frequently in the description of projects with which highly industrialized countries try to improve the living conditions in developing countries. The idea is to help those countries to avoid the errors "we" made when we experienced fast economic growth several decades ago. I have been especially struck by the way in which the Western media will systematically describe new roads built in the Tibetan areas as being a crime against nature and the Tibetan culture, when the huge majority of Tibetans welcome every single kilometer of new roads or highways because they are very often the only way out of poverty and isolation.

Before we judge people who try to improve its standard of living, we should consider the material conditions under which this process operates and the available technology. For example, pushing people living in densely populated areas to use public transportation makes sense and is an absolute necessity. Doing the same in places like the Tibetan areas with an extremely low population density is just a way of keeping them cut off from the rest of the world. "The world" means not only consumerism and (our) materialism, but also vital education and healthcare. Therefore, the wishes of the local population will rank on top of the priorities on which the present project is built.

Ethic guidelines of the present project

The absolute guideline is that everything which is done within the framework of the present project must conform to the wishes of the huge majority of the local people living in the Tibetan areas. All efforts will be made to get the opinion of a maximum of people. So far, the feedback to this project from Tibetans living in the Chinese Tibetan areas is 100% positive.

Some Westerners might feel uneasy (to say the least) with the approach proposed here, which consists in a better integration of the Tibetan areas with the Chinese and world tourism market and other national and international activities, e.g. sports. However, the Tibetans I have met so far are all very much looking forward to a greater opening to the world, of course under three conditions:

- they benefit from this exchange;
- they have got some control over it;
- it happens within the respect of their language, culture and religion and contributes to preserving and developing this heritage.

These three conditions will therefore be the guiding principles throughout the present project. It goes without saying that the highest ethical standards commonly admitted for research projects in Western countries and in China will also be applied to the present project. In particular, everything will be done to avoid that anybody is harmed directly or indirectly because of this project.

All that is done must also conform to the local legislation, e.g. to the legislation of the People's Republic of China for whatever happens on the territory of this country. We will work in close collaboration with the authorities in all of the countries involved in the project.

Ecologically sustainable tourism

Preserving their precious environment is part of the values cherished in the Tibetan culture. Therefore, all the efforts will be undertaken to promote an ecologically responsible tourism. However, we should keep in mind that one of the most urgent ecological problems that the Tibetan areas face right now is the damage to the fragile soil due to overgrazing. Therefore, providing the local herders with additional revenue is also a top priority, because it will allow them to reduce their livestock.

Another ecological benefit will be reporting about the ecological solutions widely used in the Tibetan areas like solar stoves, solar warm water panels, passive solar architecture through glassed porches, etc. We should not forget that the major polluters are obviously the highly industrialized countries.

Protecting their environment is very important to the local people of the Tibetan areas. Therefore, making sure that the local people agree with every single item developed within the framework of the project will make sure that everything will be ecologically sustainable. Contacts will be made with environment experts in Chinese and Western universities to benefit from current knowhow and research projects.



Figure 22: Solar stoves and glassed porches are in common use in the Tibetan areas to make use of the sun light

Socially sustainable tourism

As outlined above, the whole project is based on helping local entrepreneurs become more competitive on the national and international tourism market. Family enterprises embedded in the local community have always contributed more than any other form of entrepreneurship to the success of the Chinese economy. At the same time, they are a way of making sure that the revenue and competence derived from development is widely spread among the people. The recent increase in the wealth gap in China is certainly not due to this sector of the economy.

Among Western tourism specialists, a widely accepted scheme for building up a socially sustainable tourism is made of three steps. Entry level jobs are considered to be hourly paid low-qualification jobs like the famous dishwashers. Responsible development models are supposed to allow people holding such positions to advance to mid-level jobs with monthly pay, and (in the best case) to upper level jobs with real responsibility. This model applies essentially to big companies like multi-billion tourism resorts. An alternative way of making sure that the local people are in charge and get most of the benefit is of course to focus on family enterprises. Some touristic areas have chosen this development model in the past. For example, in many Austrian mountainous regions, boarding houses set up by local farmers are serious competitors to large hotels.

One of the major assets of the Tibetan areas is the huge spaces. Calm and nature will always be one of the major reasons why tourists might want to come to that place. Therefore, we can conjecture that the fragmented character of the hospitality sector is probably there to last. This could preserve it from the take-over by big capital which is so common in many other tourism destinations. The Chinese development model based on small family enterprises which are protected by limitations on foreign capital and by the collective management of the local communities could become the next export hit. If it can contribute to building up the Tibetan tourism industry, this would be a major success for this model.

Leakage and linkage

Two concepts are key to quantify the durable character of tourism projects: Leakage and linkage. Leakage designates the proportion of the generated income which "leaks" out of the region, e.g. which is used to buy services and goods from outside of the region. Earnings generated from outside capital which are

repatriated are another example of leakages. Making development durable means that leakages must be reduced to the strict minimum: a region can only develop if the income stays there.

Linkage, on the contrary, designates the links between the various economic actors of the region which are created by the new economic activity. Typically, this can be linkage between the food and beverage industry and the local agriculture, or between local entrepreneurs who need a new hotel and local building companies.

Several measures can reduce leakage. The most important is to make sure that the Western tourism multinational companies do not take over the whole region. It must be hoped that the Chinese government will not capitulate to Western pressure to open its services sector further. Many development specialists consider the Western model of building tourism resorts in remote areas to be the perfect example of "economic development" which does not benefit the local people; it is often described as a "tiger" which eats up everything on its way.



Figure 23: In this kind of gigantic beach tourism resorts owned by Western multinational companies, local people get only low-level jobs.

Chinese lowland tourism is not dominated by a few multinational companies like the Western tourism. However, it is obvious that the Tibetan local entrepreneurs will always face stiff competition from entrepreneurs from the Chinese lowland, where entrepreneurs have got more capital and business connections. Setting up certification organizations can be a way of addressing this problem. There will always be tourists who want to stay in hotels managed by experienced Han Chinese and eat the well-known Sichuan cuisine they are used to. On the other hand, with the necessary promotional work in the media, many tourists will certainly be willing to support the emergence of local entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.

In China as well as in Western countries, many people are willing to "try out something new", especially if the perceived risk of their holidays becoming a horror trip is reduced to a minimum by adequate information and quality control on the ground. Here we are again at the issue of building up certification organizations and a trusted and well-known brand. These are definitely tools to make local economic development more durable.

An essential aspect of developmental and promotional work will be the food and beverage industry. Chinese and Western tourists alike are known for preferring to eat the food they are used to even during holiday travelling. On the other hand, in both these client reservoirs, there is a food consumption tradition which can be used to attract them to try out at least some kind of "hybridized" Tibetan cuisine: in China, wild vegetable from the mountains are frequently served in high standing restaurants. In Western countries, there is the whole tradition of Asian restaurants.

All this can contribute to reduce leakage and increase linkage: except for rice, vegetables and the indispensable ketchup for the Tibet burgers (all of which are cheap products), everything can be found in the Tibetan areas in a quality which is much higher than imported food from other regions. Here again, certification and branding can induce the tourists to pay for "high value added food".

High value added tourism

The Tibetan areas are a huge region where there is enough space for many different kinds of tourism. Some experts consider mass tourism as a curse and recommend the exclusive build-up of high value-added tourism. Bhutan for instance has applied a policy with an imposed minimum spending per day required for getting a visa. However, such a restriction is neither necessary nor desirable for the Tibetan areas.

Bhutan is a small country; its topography made of deep mountain valleys further reduces the available surface. The Tibetan areas, on the contrary, are much more thinly populated than Bhutan and have got huge high plains which are perfect for the low-density tourism which is so popular with clients from highly industrialized states. There are even regions which are almost totally unpopulated, especially in the north-west of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. For the tourists who are especially fond of empty spaces, this offers unlimited possibilities.

The Tibetan areas should not be considered to be "one tourism destination" like for example the French Côte d'Azur or a Swiss skiing resort. The Tibetan areas offer a greater variety than the whole European Alps. Therefore, many kinds of tourism can coexist without interfering with each other.

However, it is obvious that the Tibetan areas should try to get into the segment of high value added tourism. The benefit margins are greater and the benefit in terms of acquired knowhow is larger than in typical Western mass tourism. On the other hand, the upper segment of the market requires a lot of experience in customer service and quality management, which the local entrepreneurs do not have right now. The ideal entry level market segment is probably a mix of backpacker tourism and middle class tourism.



Figure 24: Such luxury hotels in the Swiss Alps should be considered to be a long term objective for tourism in the Tibetan areas.

Right now, there is not much organized mass tourism in China yet. When Chinese people want to travel on the cheap, they choose destinations where they have got friends or relatives. They will pay only for a train ticket and they will stay with their friends or relatives and have most meals in their home. Organized tourism is still a luxury product. However, this will certainly change soon, and this trend will probably affect tourism towards certain regions of the Tibetan areas.

It is therefore urgent to build up the economic infrastructure for a locally controlled mid-level and then high-end tourism. This can be achieved quite easily through local entrepreneurs who have got very limited capital each: unlike mass tourism, it does not require huge hotels or theme parks. In a second step, this will allow some local entrepreneurs to expand into mass tourism, if they wish to do so. Otherwise, the danger is that mass tourism gets under the total control of non-local capital, which would mean that the local population has got the nuisance without getting the benefit.

Education

Even though a "business culture" is emerging within the Tibetan areas, formal education will be vital to make sure that businesses can be managed efficiently. Education must include theoretical as well as practical skills.

The present Chinese educational system has achieved remarkable successes. However, it has performed much better in theoretical fields like natural science and engineering than in the teaching of practical skills. These are precisely the kind of skills needed to build up and promote a local tourism industry.

The past Chinese economic development is largely based on industry. In the services sector and more specifically in the build-up of renowned brands, the Chinese economy has largely underperformed. Whereas China has got an impressive trade surplus in merchandise trade, it shows a trade deficit in the services sector. Most of the exported goods are marketed under foreign brands.

The performance of the Chinese tourism industry to attract Western tourists is also notably weak. Most of the Chinese tourism specialists working in Western countries target Chinese tourists travelling to Western countries; trying to earn money with the reverse direction is generally considered to be a zero growth field.

The present project will therefore address some of the major weak points of the Chinese economy. If successful, many lessons can be learned in the important fields of communication, marketing, branding and certification.

All points to the vital importance of getting educational input from foreign countries into this project. Switzerland has always been disproportionately visible on the international scene as compared to its tiny size. This visibility has often been linked to its initiatives in mediating international conflicts or to its humanitarian involvement. However, more lucrative activities like banking, the watch industry and tourism have certainly contributed to a large extent. Switzerland has been able to forge an image of reliability and quality.

In the field of tourism, Switzerland has got not only a world-renowned tourism industry, but also first-class hotel schools. According to most rankings, three out of the five best hotel schools in the world are Swiss. Staff members from the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, which is first in most rankings, have already agreed to contribute to this project.



Figure 25: The Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne is smiled upon by some academics because it teaches a blend of theoretical and practical skills, but its graduates are the most appreciated by the hospitality industry worldwide.

Another important field for developing tourism in the Tibetan areas is the teaching of languages, especially Chinese and English. The knowledge of Chinese is already quite good among some ethnic Tibetans and of course no problem among Han and Hui Chinese living in that region. On the other hand, even basic English skills are extremely rare.

Switzerland has always had to rely heavily on foreign language teaching at all levels in order to insure cohesion among its four linguistic communities; most of the "foreign" languages involved are actually nation languages spoken in other regions. Especially in minority areas like the Romandie (French speaking), Ticino (Italian speaking) and the Rhaeto-Romanic region (speaking Rhaeto-Romance, a language belonging to the Latin language family), foreign language skills are vital to higher level careers. In the universal draft militia army, soldiers and officers from different language regions are often mixed. The close contacts of the present project to the Faculty of Arts and to the Goethe-Institut Examination Center of the University of Lausanne will make sure that the necessary theoretical knowledge and practical experience are available to improve language teaching in the Tibetan areas.

Another Swiss characteristic is also an important asset: its economic structure is mainly based on small and middle size enterprises; this is true especially in the field of tourism. From this point of view, the Chinese and the Swiss economic structure are somewhat similar, despite the important difference in size; the similarity is of course even more pronounced with the Tibetan areas. This should make it easier to transpose the Swiss experience in the field of tourism to the Tibetan tourism industry.

However, it is not very productive to conceptualize the educational aspects of this project as a simple "knowledge and experience transfer". One of the most important aims will be to identify the characteristics of the local culture which are related to education and to set up the educational aspects of the present project accordingly.

Conclusion

The project presented here can certainly contribute to the development of a local tourism industry in the Tibetan areas. The various Swiss experts who are interested in taking part in this project have got precious knowhow and are willing to share it. However, the benefits of this project will go well beyond the local economic development. So far, Western China experts have hardly paid any attention to the Chinese getihu system and to its contribution to recent economic development in rural regions all over the country. The interaction of this system with the Swiss expertise in coordination, marketing, branding and certification could open new perspectives for this fragmented, but highly flexible and efficient economic model. This project could therefore show the way not only for the development of tourism in the Tibetan areas, but also for economic development in general for other countries which have not found their way to fast economic growth yet.

