ASIAN THOUGHT AND CULTURE

Partners in Paradise

Tourism Practices, Heritage Policies, and Anthropological Sites

Robert Shepherd

How and why do some places in the world become symbols of illusive paradise, and what does this mean for their residents? Moving between anthropology, tourism, and the increasingly influential cultural heritage movement, *Partners in Paradise* examines the origins of a Euro-American fascination with places imagined to exist outside of Modernity. Focusing on the emergence of Tibet and Bali as, in turn, anthropological field sites, tourist destinations, and cultural heritage sites, it argues that the work of academic researchers, tourists, and cultural preservationists inform and constitute each other, in the process constructing particular places as "paradise". Unpacking this process is a necessary first step in understanding how Tibetans and Balinese negotiate their place in a modern world in which the meaning of "paradise" is contested. Drawing on anthropology, history, and tourist studies, *Partners in Paradise* offers a unique lens on the politics of development, modernization, and cultural preservation.

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This book is dedicated to Jean Paul Dumont, adventurer, scholar, painter, and cultivator of curiosity, who took me on as a graduate student and showed me in his own unique way how to think about the world.

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And of course, all errors are mine.

Introduction

Anthropology, Tourism and Heritage

> The only aim of this book ... is to collect in one volume all that could be obtained from personal experience by an unscientific artist, of a living culture that is doomed to disappear under the merciless onslaught of modern commercialism and standardization.
>
> Miguel Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*

This book examines the relationship between the field practices of anthropology, the preservation goals of cultural heritage, and the consumption desires of tourism. Anthropological research has been conducted on the process and problems of fieldwork (Cf. Dumont 1978; Kullick & Wilson 1995), the relationship between anthropological fieldwork and tourism (Cf. Crick 1985 & 1995; Dumont 1984; Bruner 1989; Errington & Gewertz 1989), and, in recent years, the promotion of cultural heritage sites (Butler 2007, Hancock 2008). Yet little work has been done on the interrelationship between these three practices.

I am interested in the ways in which these three practices (anthropological fieldwork, tourism, and heritage) shape and enable each other. Through their fieldwork, anthropologists draw notice to particular cultural practices and sites; some of these sites and practices are classified by state authorities as 'heritage'; once so classified, these in turn become tourist attractions, which often leads particular aspects of 'the state' and international preservationists to call for limits on tourism in order to protect this 'heritage'. In this study I am particularly interested in the cultivation of a particular type of field site/tourist destination/heritage site, what I call paradise-scapes.

The Discourse of Paradise

If, for the sixteenth century English poet John Milton, paradise had been lost by Adam and Eve, it nevertheless found a place in the imaginations of many people in Europe with the discovery of new geographical environments. Although Columbus and those who followed him failed in their quest to discover El Dorado, European and American explorers and adventurers found something just as desirable, the South Pacific, West Indies, and other tropical islands. The first sites of anthropological fieldwork, tropical islands have

simultaneously been portrayed as both Edenic paradises and exemplar of the *Heart of Darkness* (Escobar 1996: 386). Indeed, for more than three hundred years, Europeans and North Americans have written of islands of exotic foods, promiscuous women, and a life of leisure, intermixed with lurid stories of violence and cannibalism, a discourse of tropicality that shows no signs of abating (Arnold 1996).

These islands of sensual pleasure and visceral danger were joined in the early twentieth century by a new locale for paradise, remote mountain valleys ruled over by God-like men who controlled physical desires with spiritual tranquility. Lush tropical islands on which food is plentiful, disease is unknown, and sex exists outside the prison house of moral prudishness came to co-exist with mountain enclaves where austerity is a mark of goodness, emptiness is a sign of spirituality, and mental contemplation, not physical satisfaction, guides life.

This desire to find places outside of modernity grew during a time of rapid material changes brought by modernity. Roughly four decades separate the end of the American Civil War in 1865 with the British occupation of Lhasa in 1904 and the Dutch conquest of Bali in 1908. During this period almost all of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific were colonized by Europeans and Americans. New forms of technology that appeared ranged from automatic weapons, long range artillery, automobiles and planes to ocean liners, wireless communications, movies, bicycles, x-ray machines, and refrigerators (Bishop 1989: 139). By the turn of the twentieth century, the *Realpolitik* of Social Darwinism and the civilizing impulse of high colonialism had begun to generate a counter-response within metropolitan areas. The colonial project increasingly began being portrayed as bittersweet, both a triumph of civilization and progress as well as a regretful opening up of more innocent places to the competitive world of capitalism (Anand 2007: 29). Spaces that had not yet been colonized such as Tibet were simultaneously infantilized and looked to as storehouses of wisdom, lands existing outside of (modern) time and therefore not yet corrupted.

Yet it would be overly reductionist to explain a late nineteenth century interest in cultivating and preserving spaces outside of modernity as solely a response to colonialism. In other words, to identify the emergence of a naturalist aesthetic as a reaction to the aggressive utilitarianism of Euro-American imperialism simply replicates the Orientalist tendencies of the contemporary environmental movement and alternative traveler rhetoric, in which 'they' (non-Western peoples) are both more authentic in their relationship to nature and

constantly in danger of being tainted by 'us' (the 'West', modernity, mass consumer society). Indeed, environmentalism and conservationism did not emerge in opposition to colonialism and imperialism, but as products of the colonial encounter (Grove 1995). Beginning in the fifteenth century, European exploration was motivated not only by economic gain, but also by a search for a better life. To put this differently, a "search for Eden" was simultaneously a search for gold, timber sources, botanical knowledge, and access to the wealth of India and China (ibid, 22–24).

Islands have been ground-zero in this search for more than four centuries. Functioning as micro-worlds, the first European colonies in the Atlantic and Caribbean served as experimental stations for not just the extraction of wealth but also for analyzing the environmental impact of these economic policies. While it is true that the mechanistic and utilitarian logic of Locke and Mill transformed the natural world into a collection of resources to harness, this same logic enabled the measurement of the human impact on nature (Grove 1995: 51). By the seventeenth century Caribbean tropical islands were widely recognized as both paradises and as crucial economic wealth producers.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century search for Shangri-La was, however, fundamentally different. A colonial desire to promote conservation as a necessary component of a well-run colony was replaced by a very different desire, to escape from modernity and its emphasis on reason, logic, and utility. However, the irony in this quest was that, for many such travelers, life in modernity might have been bad, but the material privileges of modernity were thoroughly enjoyable. To put this crudely, the goal for many travelers, wanderers, and spiritual adventurers was not to leave modernity behind but to carry it with them. The form this took ranged from cold beer, servants, electricity, and swimming pools in the Bali of the 1930s to an international telegraph connection and an occasional game of cricket in Lhasa following the British occupation in 1904. But unlike, say, the colonial bureaucrat, the Christian missionary, or the development worker, there was no intention of bringing the subjects of Shangri-La into the present. They instead existed as part of these non-places. This conflicting desire to enjoy and preserve paradise versus changing it lies at the heart of the Euro-American encounter with the world at large (Said 1979). To quote the late Ben Anderson: "disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary" (2006: 11).

From *Lost Horizons* to *Bali Hai*

For much of the twentieth century, two places in the world were symbolic of a dichotomous desire for physical pleasure and spiritual enlightenment, the island of Bali and the Kingdom of Tibet. In many ways, these two places could not be more different. Bali is a small tropical island located just below the Equator, close to some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Tibet is a sprawling, dry, mountainous region situated high in the Himalayas, between China and India. Balinese are overwhelmingly Hindu, Tibetans Buddhist. Politically, Bali is a self-governing province within the Republic of Indonesia, while Tibet has been carved into Indian-occupied Ladakh, the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Yunnan, and Sichuan, and the nominally self-governing Tibetan Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China. When tourists think of Bali, most no doubt imagine tropical beaches; when they think of Tibet, they usually imagine chanting monks.

Yet, despite these differences, the popular narratives of Bali and Tibet mirror the Biblical story of humanity's fall from grace and exile from paradise. For many people, especially among the European and North American educated classes, Bali is a once-pristine island, populated by a cultured and deeply religious people, now inundated by tourism. Some may also know that the island was colonized, though far fewer probably know by whom (Holland), just as many also probably do not know that it is now part of the Muslim-majority Republic of Indonesia. What they do know, through reading travel guides such as *The Lonely Planet*, is that the island today has been supposedly reduced to a commercial playground for tourists in search of a beach holiday and exotic thrills. Similarly, Tibet is imagined to have been isolated from the world and home to a happy and content society of devout Buddhists who lived their lives free from daily wants and desires. However, the Chinese intervention in 1951 and occupation in 1959 caused, according to common belief, the wholesale destruction of Tibetan culture, culminating in the madness of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Although freed from Mao Zedong and his Red Guards, Tibet today is assaulted by mass tourism, which will inevitably succeed where Mao failed, by turning 'the land of snows' into a destination spot devoid of authentic culture.

It is certainly easy to construct a defense of these story lines. After all, most observers would agree that tourism permeates life on Bali. Western backpackers congregate in the cheap hotels and bars of Kuta Beach, the wealthy and famous at the five-star hotels of Nusa Dua, and self-styled travelers in the artistic center