The chronotopes of authenticity: Designing the Tujia heritage in China

by

Xuan Wang and Sjaak Kroon (Tilburg University)

x.wang@tilburguniversity.edu
s.kroon@tilburguniversity.edu

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1. Mapping out Heritage Tourism in Peripheral Globalization

19 August 2013 was no ordinary day for the Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, a rural minority region located in the deep mountains of Hubei Province in Central China. It was the day that marked the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Enshi, the last officially recognized ethnic minority prefecture (of the Tujia, the Miao and twenty-six other smaller groups) in the People’s Republic of China. For the local communities, this day was not only a reminder of the historic moment when an entirely different and significant political-cultural identity, of minority, was given to them by the state, but also a formal occasion to showcase and celebrate the particularized cultural heritage they have assumed since that moment, to perform and re-enact that heritage in a present-day context, and, more importantly, to marketize aspects of authenticity in relation to their identity and heritage — whether prescribed or ascribed — in order to set their foot in the new economy of heritage tourism and become part of the globalization processes in China. In the fortnight leading up to the special day, dozens of major events and activities were organized in various parts of Enshi (of which one will be analyzed in detail later), combining commemoration, showcasing, celebration, performing, reenactment and marketization, with the Tujia, the largest indigenous ethnic group of the prefecture, playing the leading role.

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, what we are witnessing is a remarkable instance — a chronotopic invocation — of globalization in the periphery. We will qualify what we mean by this theoretically and empirically in this study. For now, suffice it to say that events and activities such as those of Enshi merit careful examination. In the periphery — being geopolitical and sociocultural minority in the case of Enshi — just as in the “center”, unprecedented economic
and cultural transformations as well as renewed local awareness and identity politics are to various extents taking place. For the people in Enshi, similar to disenfranchized ethnic and small-culture groups elsewhere, heritage tourism provides niched albeit crucial access to and infrastructure of globalization through which opportunities of economic and identity repositioning become available and explored (Wang et al., 2014; see also Heller, 2003, 2010 and papers in Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013), and such dynamics, as we will see later, are sociolinguistically densely substantiated in key moments such as the founding anniversary of Enshi. What we will observe in moments like these, also as the central argument we would like to bring from this study, is that, it is through multiple chronotopic organizations of semiotic and discursive manoeuvring that peripheral groups arrive at a sense of authenticity that fulfils heritage tourism as both an economic and identity project instated by globalization.

In this sense, investigation of heritage tourism in places like Enshi and its complex processes and implications constitutes an integral part of sociolinguistics from the periphery (Wang et al., 2014; Pietikäinen et al., 2016), and, as such, sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2003, 2010; Coupland, 2010a). While this point may in itself be elementary and unequivocal, further thematic points central to this study on heritage tourism and peripheral globalization need to be unpacked.

Our basic starting point is that, for the purpose of this study, we position ourselves away from a certain “urban bias” that may exist in studies of globalization (see Wang et al., 2014 for a critique), of which metropolitan centers tend to serve as the default epitome of empirical occurrences and interpretive framework. This bias can easily lead us into the pitfall of failing to detect or take serious enough the kind of “banal globalization” (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010) in the periphery — the “ordinariness” in “unexpected places” (Pennycook, 2012) — which is largely rooted in seemingly slow, passive (i.e. orienting towards centers), small-scale, and non-superdiverse semiotic realizations when contrasting to the “center”. Recent scholarship has challenged such assumptions and made evident that sociolinguistics from the periphery can enrich our understanding of the shifting and complexifying center-periphery dynamics, and patterns of diversification and reconfiguration of language, community, and identity in late modernity (as documented in e.g. Heller, 2003, 2010, 2014a; Blommaert, 2008, 2010; Pardue, 2011; Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013; Sultana, Dovinch & Pennycook, 2013;
Juffermans, 2015; Pietikäinen et al., 2016). Moreover, these works lend forceful support to a critical and ethnographically grounded approach by emphasizing attention to and monitoring of “knowledge from below” (Van der Aa & Blommaert, 2015) in order for more nuanced and precise representation and theorization of the increasingly decentralized, complexifying realities and subaltern voices arising from the grassroots and peripheries. In this study, we follow this line of argument and engage with Enshi as periphery through the consideration of the “local” (e.g. Canagarajah, 2005; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Higgins, 2009; Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2007, 2010), that is, the local re-contextualization and re-embedding of global flows (such as heritage tourism), within the local history, ecology and ideology of meaning making, from the perspective of the periphery itself.

Following on, the case of Enshi focuses our gaze on specific aspects of peripherality, notably heritage, a notion intrinsic to ethnic and cultural identity and at the core of the local globalization processes, lodged in the new economy of heritage (thus identity) tourism. As pointed out by Pujolar (2014: 56), “heritage is indexical of peripherality within the framework of modernity”, and it is through the reproduction of the modernist ideology and discourse of antiquarianism and linguistic nationalism (as described in Bauman & Briggs, 2003) that particular forms of the past and ways of life — i.e. history and tradition — are evoked, “invented” (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983), and projected onto specific spaces and people, creating “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991) such as the nation-state and distinct ethnocultural groups. Thus, heritage, with the particular(ized) cultural and identity forms and meanings it exudes, is a product of modernity as a self-fulfilling project, in which the latter is articulated through constructing tradition as its own (perceived) defining complement and contrasting Other, and “the root pair can be elaborated into a whole lexicon of dichotomous adjectives: ancient and modern, indigenous and cosmopolitan, hidden and transparent, mysterious and known, obscure and legible, pure and impure, substantial and ephemeral, and most of all authentic and inauthentic” (Upton, 2001: 298-299). In this sense, heritage encompasses multiple intersecting (e.g. geographical, economic, political, and social) dimensions of peripherality.

Perhaps it is in modern nation-building that the “ethno” layer of making heritage through the counterpart Other finds its most poignant expression. There, heritage is deployed as an instrument for the conceiving of nationhood and national identity, from which groups of eth-
nocultural minorities are made visible — often from the perspective of the majority groups and set off against them, representing the alterity while also being an indispensible part of a (supposedly) shared memory and history — so as to rationalize and legitimize the hegemony of the majorities and to promote the nationalist course of unity, cohesion, and homogeneity from within. The effect of such processes is not only the invention of ethnicities, what Roosens (1989) terms “ethnogenesis”, but, necessarily, the minorization and marginalization of these groups on the basis of their geography, economic power, cultural pattern, language, etc., enunciated in set descriptors such as the “remote”, “local”, “agrarian”, “primordial”, “outdated”, and “subordinate”, which are in turn circulated as historical truths.

The way in which ethnocultural heritage works as a political instrument and (controlled) knowledge basis of an ethnotaxonomy for forging and maintaining nation-states and multicultural societies, manifests itself in various geopolitical contexts (see e.g. Rex, 1996; Bennett, 1998; Pavinelli, 2002; Bendix, Eggert & Peselmann, 2012). China is a case in point, wherein the state ideology and discourse of a “unified, multinational country” has resulted in the official classification of fifty-six ethnic nationalities (with the Han being the majority and constituting more than ninety percent of the Chinese population) shortly after the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 (see Mullaney (2012) for a historical account). This self-imagined diversity is managed through the duality of political regulation and acculturation of the “barbaric” minorities by the “advanced” Han majority (Ma, 2016), and state-sponsored multiculturalism is such that the ethnocultural identity and diversity are routinely represented in the juxtaposition of fifty-six equal but — with the exception of the Han — uniquely and exotically dressed individuals. Together, in their ethnicized and semioticized physical appearances, these individuals symbolize and embody at once the fifty-six different ethnic groups and one harmonious whole. Such an image arguably belongs to the kind of compartmentalized multiculturalism in which particular(ized) clothings (and bodies) become the essential(ized) emblematic token of ethnocultural diversity and heritage, resonating with Gladney’s (1994, 2004; see also Blum, 2001; McCarthy, 2009) exposition of the construction of subaltern subjects and peripheral citizens by virtue of the exoticization of the minorities in Chinese ethnopolitics (see Wang, 2015 for a discussion). Hence, heritage in the Chinese multiculturalism, comparable to scenes elsewhere, is a politically loaded construct that seeks out the (exotic, dissembling, visible) minority from the (normative, invisible) majority from within the nation in order to sus-
tain and authenticate its core political economy. Its logic of using cultural items, be it clothing, language, or something else, to mark out social positions and differences closely resembles Bourdieu’s (1979) notion of “distinction”, fraught with hegemony, inequality and peripherality.

In the context of globalization, the need for articulating and promoting heritage seems heightened (in centers and peripheries). On the one hand, afforded by unprecedented mobility, the translocal flows of people, cultural practices, and other previously local and sedentary aspects of our life are experiencing deterritorialization, displacement, and cultural disjunctures and differences (Appadurai, 1996), as well as, more fundamentally, time-space distantiation (Harvey, 1989), disrupting and fragmenting the sense of historical linearity and continuity in which we tend to locate ourselves in relation to the world we live in. According to Giddens (1991), late modern conditions induce a drastic sense of anxiety over loss, loss of predictability, security, and “enregistered” (Agha, 2005) frames of reference, accompanied by loss of shared experiences, tradition, community, and identity. In this context, re-discovering and re-establishing local attachment and identity through the preservation and rejuvenation of history and heritage, both tangible and intangible, have become all the more important. On the other hand, in a different vein, the emergence of heritage tourism as part of the globalized new economy has created niche (tertiary) markets for the production and consumption of heritage (and its associated artefacts and experiences). As demonstrated by Heller (e.g. 2003, 2010, 2014a, 2014b), the rise of the new economy in late capitalism (after the receding and reorganization of the primary and secondary sectors in the center) rests largely on the commodification of the periphery and the transaction of the added value of symbolic distinctions between the periphery and the center (typified in the form of identity tourism). Driven by this new economic pattern, heritage tourism becomes a primary stage on which discourses, images, and objects of such center-periphery distinctions — framed as heritage — are produced, performed, circulated, and consumed. This form of globalization, as mentioned earlier, is crucial to the disenfranchised ethnic and small-culture groups, from whom a surge in heritage-based tourism activities sprouts, noticeably in the ethnocultural peripheries of China (e.g. Sue & Tao, 2009; Gao, 2014; see Wang, 2015 for the Tujia in Enshi).
Our discussion so far underscores the conceptualization of heritage in relation to the conditions of modernity and globalization, which unveils the systemic peripherality heritage indexes as well as the globalized economic, political, and cultural motifs in which it operates. In so doing, what we are actually problematizing, is the underlying issue of “authenticity”. Given that authenticity is pivotal to both heritage as identity making and heritage as tourism commodification, probing into this issue will help address the extent to which the heritage (tourism) project, such as that of Enshi, gauges with the global and local regimes of meaning making and enables itself a tenable position in both the tourism market and the cultural politics of recognition. In other words, we need to examine how the Tujia in Enshi, through heritage tourism as a new opportunity, can be considered authentic simultaneously for the existing state multiculturalism, the new tourist market, and the place itself: authenticity as a polycentric challenge. As we now turn to discuss the way authenticity is conceptually constituted in heritage tourism and peripheral globalization, we will also move towards the Bakhtinian (1981) notion of “chronotope” as a useful heuristic for detecting and understanding the interconnectedness and interplays of different aspects of and for authenticity.

2. Framing Heritage Authenticity and Chronotopic Identities

As Giddens (1991) has reminded us, with the world of late modernity being ridden with senses of crisis, the politics of identity and, along with it, the ideology of authenticity, become pervasive. In an era when traditional morality has more or less lost its authority, feeling true to oneself emerges as a crucial part of the reflexive project of self-actualization in searching for a renewed understanding of self and society (ibid; see also Erikson, 1995). This nevertheless goes hand in hand with evaluations from the others in relation to the “horizons of significance”, namely, within the relevant contexts and frameworks of meaning making (Taylor, 1991). Taking into account the social, political, cultural, and psychological perspectives, authenticity can be encapsulated as “an assumedly common enterprise whose social functioning is a driving force of each individual’s behavior and is evaluated according to cultural contexts and mediated by and expressed in language” (Lacoste, Leimgruber & Breyer, 2014a:1).
The way authenticity is sociolinguistically materialized, indexed, negotiated, and performed has been systematically examined in the works of Coupland (e.g. 2003, 2010b, 2014) and others (see e.g. Thornborrow & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Bucholtz, 2003; Pennycook, 2007; Blommaert & Varis, 2013; Wilce & Fenigsen, 2014; Locaste, Leimbruger & Breyer, 2014b). We take the converging arguments in these works as follows (see Coupland, 2014 for an overview): (1) authenticity is always expressed through the deployment of linguistic, discursive and/or semiotic resources; (2) in globalization, meanings of authenticity are increasingly embedded in both local and translocal frames of reference; (3) authenticity is better understood as the effect of “authentication”, that is, the tensions and dynamics between normative constraints and agentive production — with the goal to establish and reach a benchmark of (often multi-layered) “enoughness”; (4) the emphasis on de-essentializing authenticity and on its performative dimension points us towards new potentials of interpreting (seemingly inauthentic) cultural and identity behaviors.

While we locate our analysis of the case of Enshi in the framework outlined above, for the purpose of this study we draw particular attention to the mechanisms of authenticity in heritage tourism and peripheral globalization. As said, heritage emerges as a modernist construct, with its normative parameters — “orders of authenticity” (Wang, 2012) — centering on geopolitical and sociocultural peripherality and serving to sustain the political economy of the nation-state. This can be seen, for example, in the essentialized othering through exoticitization of ethnocultural heritage in Chinese multiculturalism, which is largely based on the state-prescribed ethnotaxonomy from the perspective of the Han majority. Heritage tourism capitalizes on exactly the kind of asymmetrical distinction created by dichotomizing the majority versus the minority, the advanced versus the barbaric, the urban versus the rural, the modern versus the traditional, the global versus the local, etc.. Its core business, therefore, is both the semiotization and commodification of authenticity (Heller, 2003, 2014b; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005; Waterton & Watson, 2014) which, on the part of the periphery-supplier, involves selecting specific cultural resources and communicating them in highly specific ways for specific audiences on specific occasions. Such processes, necessarily “inauthentic” due to modification and commodification, arguably generate alternative revenues of “inauthentic authenticity” (Wang, 2015). As Heller (2014b: 154) asserts, in understanding authenticity in the periphery, “[c]ommodification affords us a window into ongoing change, allowing us to
link up individual subjectivity, interactional processes, and the conditions of the symbolic market”.

How, then, can we study the actual forms taken by this sociolinguistic process of commodification, caught in the polycentric challenge of authenticity described earlier? How can we, in answering the previous question, also account for the inevitable “inauthenticity” connoted in the act of commodification (and associated performativity), and the way the paradoxical inauthenticity is organized as a sustainable and coherent part into a shared lifeworld? Here, Bakhtin’s seminal idea of “chronotope” and its recent sociolinguistic uptakes (e.g. Agha, 2007; Lampert & Perrino, 2007; Woolard, 2013; Blommaert & De Fina, 2016) offer us a great source of inspiration.

In Bakhtin’s literary analysis, “chronotope” was used for addressing “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed” in novels (Bakhtin, 1981: 84), namely, the timespace specificity from which discourse of plot, history, and identity emerges. For Bakhtin, time and space are inseparable in constructing narratives and characters; they function as a fused, concrete whole — identifiable as chronotope — which is structured and encoded in specific ways, generating historical and semiotic conditions of meaning making. This conceptualization makes it possible to dissect and describe the multiple timespace configurations that co-occur, not only in literary (en)textuality, in terms of novelistic chronotopes through which readers can extract and connect multiple social meanings and agencies represented in a story, but more generally, as cultural chronotopes: “depiction of place-time-and-personhood to which social interactants orient when they engage each other through discursive signs of any kind” (Agha, 2007: 320).

This cultural potential of chronotopes is formulated as “invokable histories” in Blommaert’s (2015: 110) attempt to bring together the notion of chronotope and those of context and scale for accounting for the complexity of language in society. Drawing on the central argument of discourse in history, Blommaert (2015: 108) is able to consider chronotope as an important aspect of contextualization in which “meaning as value effects [is] derived from local enactments of historically loaded semiotic resources” (see also Gumperz , 2003; Silverstein, 2003;
Agha, 2005; Blommaert, 2005). From the perspective of historicity, all interactive events can be seen as chronotopically organized, situated in timespace, occurring as here-and-now while indexing a myriad of “historically configured and ordered tropes” (Blommaert, 2015: 111). These tropes, or culturally recognizable systems of meanings and values, are applied and made understandable through genres, by means of ideologized, normative, and enregistered features and styles that index and codify specific time-space relations. In this sense, each chronotope installs its own discursive frames and orders of indexicality (and, thus, of authenticity); invocation of time-space also constitutes ascription of genres, registers, indexicals, and other chronotopically relevant norms, and, as such, enactment of specific intentions, manoeuvres, and effects (which are in turn open for interpretation through the lens of Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis).

The historical dimension of chronotope highlights its presupposed multiplicity and polycentricity. As already posited by Bakhtin (1981: 252), within any given literary or communicative output, the (assimilation of) spatial-temporal reality involves “major chronotopes”, each may include within it “an unlimited number of minor chronotopes” and “complex interactions among them”. Such chronotopic organizations (of fractality) are of course nonrandom, for the timespace multiplicity and polycentricity are inherently embedded in the translocal contexts of what we say and do, the historically construed and shared structures of meanings attached to the communicative resources we use, and the dialogically evolving ideas, voices, and identities — what Bakhtin (1981) has termed “heteroglossia”. Building on this interpretation, chronotope can be fruitfully combined with scale, another timespace metaphor (Blommaert, 2007, 2010; Collins et al., 2009) that illustrates the social stratification in which language resources are (unevenly) distributed and acts of communication are (unequally) materialized and evaluated against normative complexes and orders of indexicality, with hierarchically attributed meanings and values. Through the notion of scale, argues Blommaert (2015: 111), we are able to critically examine the chronotopic organizations of language resources in terms of “the degrees of availability and accessibility of adequate contexts creatively invoked in discourse” as well as “the scalar effects of recognizability”. Scale points us towards “the scope of understandability […] and] scope of creativity” (ibid) of the discursive enactment of timespace, and, we may add, the interrelations of co-occurring chronotopes within that enactment (as, for instance, distinguished by Bakhtin as “major” and “minor”) that keep different
orders of authenticity in balance. The issues at stake in chronotopes, thus, are about distinctions in power, authority, agency, and voice — issues that are part and parcel of the sociolinguistic critique on language and inequalities in the works of Bourdieu (1991), Hymes (1996) and others.

Blommaert’s intervention of chronotope by connecting it with the notions of context and scale, is aimed at a less reductive approach to the complexity presented in “the total linguistic fact” (Silverstein, 1985), a challenge faced by sociolinguistics on how to account for

“a complex construction of multiple historicities compressed into one synchronized act of performance, projecting different forms of factuality and truth, all of them ideologically configured and thus indexically deployed and all of them determined by the concrete sociolinguistic conditions of their production and uptake, endowing them with a scaled communicability at each moment of enactment.” (Blommaert, 2015: 113-114)

To this end, it may well be feasible to suggest that all communicative behaviors can be examined as chronotopically organized cultural practices in which the timespace configurations reveal not only the nano politics of identity at the personal level, but also more far-reaching sociocultural changes in cultural globalization (Blommaert & De Fina, 2016). On reflection of this (theoretical) potential, we are reminded of the point on cultural chronotopes raised by Agha (2007: 321) who argues for the scope of generalizability by defining chronotope as “a semiotic representation of time and space peopled by certain social types” (our emphasis). The agentive dimension of chronotope is made translucent, as Agha (2007: 321) states further:

“The act of producing or construing a chronotopic representation itself has a chronotopic organization (of time, space and personhood) which may be transformed by that act.” The capacity to actualize recognizable meaning, personhood, and social reality through chronotope points to its performative dimension — by orienting toward multiple, polycentric timespace frames and scaled normativities specified therein (Bayham, 2015). Such timespace orientations are essentially acts of identity and realizations of “recombinant selves” (Agha, 2007: 324), which in return may in their very processes generate new meanings and changes, thus, pushing the boundaries of authenticity.
Linking the above understanding of chronotope with our earlier discussions on heritage and authenticity, it is not difficult to see that the concept has much to offer to investigating heritage tourism and identity construction in peripheral globalization at both descriptive and analytical levels. Heritage itself is a chronotopic notion, located in a particular(ized) image of an eternalized past attached to a certain place (and group). And the use of the term, as we have established, activates a whole package of associated ways of talking, signing, dressing, and behaving. In the context of globalization, the chronotope of heritage, with its orders of authenticity centering on peripherality, maps onto that of the global center-periphery distinction amplified by late capitalism; while as an offshoot of globalization, it also merges with the chronotope of tourism driven by the commodification of authenticity. All of these are organized into the specific chronotopes in which heritage tourism is locally taken up: in our case, in Enshi as a geopolitical and sociocultural periphery of China’s modernization and globalization. Within this chronotope, importantly, is nested another chronotope of the state multiculturalism in China, emerged from its nation-building process, in which the Tujia as yet another chronotope is situated. The chronotopic nature of our object of study cannot be more patent.

But how are these different chronotopes semiotically materialized? How might the “invokable histories” be configured into a “recombinant” new act of self? To what extent is the chronotopic organization understood as “authentic”, and to whom? Let us now bring these questions into the empirical field of observation by returning to the scene, or chronotopic setting, that we opened this paper with.

3. Dissecting Chronotopes of Authenticity

That chronotopic setting is 19 August 2013, Enshi. As explained earlier, the thirtieth anniversary of Enshi as the last officially recognized minority prefecture in China punctuates a crucial and sociolinguistically dense moment of identity making. It serves as a memorial of the local ethnic minority status given by the state. It opens a stage for performing and reiterating the heritage assumed by that status for the local people. It also inserts a need to promote the local heritage tourism. The list goes on. Put in the terms we have developed above, this chronotopic setting is constituted into a combination of chronotopes that are called into intricate play on a locally contrived occasion. We will now home in on the complex details and dynam-
ics in the chronotopic configuration of the setting through a sustained look at one snapshot example.

3.1 Chronotopic Organization in Heritage Performance

The example is taken from one of the many events and activities organized locally in different parts of Enshi during the fortnight proceeding the actual anniversary day. Our ethnographic attention, access, and selection of data here are necessarily reflexively shaped our personal and subjective encounter and experience in the field, be it sometimes “incidental” (Pinsky, 2015). In this case, this has led us (through local acquaintances) to the small village of Shui Tian Ba, on 17 August 2013, two days before the official festival date of the Prefecture. Shui Tian Ba village was, until that moment, a remote and yet-to-know hamlet in the constituent county Xuan’en, the poorest county of Enshi. On that day, however, this peripheral village was turned into the center of an open air culture festival. Several different heritage-related activities were taking place from dawn to dusk, including an outdoor stage performance of ethnic art, a national mountain bike tournament, and the opening of a local Tujia folk museum, attracting tens of thousands of participants and visitors from near and far (such as Europe). A précis of the event and its multiplex timespace composition is offered by the following image (see Figure 1 below).

What we see is part of the outdoor stage performance, set in the heart of the village. In a broad sense, we can identify two immediately observable time-space frames: one of the stage, and one of the village in which the stage is set (both then merge into a third one created through the camera lens of the ethnographer). Each of them, as we will see, entails several more chronotopes which are brought in and materialized semiotically, driven by certain ideology of identity — targeted locally as heritage authenticity.
We turn first to the stage as one chronotopic unit. We start with its semiotic framing in the format of the stage background design, which is in itself a chronotopic semiotization. The background design sets the overall chronotope of the event by announcing the thematic title of the event, in big red characters: *The Prefectural Day Celebration — Walk into A Thousand Tujia Households*. Underneath, in yellow color and smaller size, are the four sub-thematic titles: (1) A Thousand Tujia Households country leisure and tourism opening ceremony; (2) the first national mountain bike invitation tournament; (3) intangible cultural heritage show; (4) A Thousand Tujia Households Ecological Beauty photography competition. This is followed by a clear signature of time and space — Xuan’en, Hubei, 19 August 2013 — and completed with names of the main organizers, participant groups, and sponsors.

Already we can see that the major chronotope here — which is in itself of dual focus — is composed of several sub-chronotopes. The core message delivered in the major chronotope is about *The Prefectural Day Celebration*, the official anniversary of the local minority status given by the state, while it converts this into a new local agenda engendered by and in turn reinforcing that status: the local heritage tourism, developed in Shui Tian Ba village as the
project of A Thousand Tujia Household (more will be said about this project). The expression “walk into” is a public invitation, paraphrasing “welcome”, indexing a tourism marketing discourse. The centrality of the double message, of the locally implemented but state-directed political, economic, and cultural priority, is indexed in the (red) color and (large) size of the writing, perhaps even in its font: with the thematic title mainly written in the font Fang Zheng (literally “clear and square”), a print font with a serious and meticulous appearance indicating formality, only leaving out the name of the local heritage project, A Thousand Tujia Households, which adopts a calligraphy font, a more flowy handwriting style to set it off against the rest of the line, perhaps to imply a degree of possibility for manoeuvring and creativity (while indexing the traditional and authentic).

This major chronotope is further developed into four sub-chronotopes. Each points to a distinct element of the heritage project that was taking place and open for sampling in Shui Tian Ba village on that day, while bringing into play four interrelated yet different strands of the local interpretation and enactment of heritage tourism. These involve (corresponding with the sequence of the sub-thematic titles presented earlier) the local being chronotopically organized as a destination (1) of rural tourism, experienced in its ethnicized primordial, idyllic lifestyle; (2) of extreme tourism, explorable as a remote and dangerous place through modern adventure sports, such as mountain biking; (3) of cultural tourism, inhabited by the ethnic Other, crystallized and exhibited in certain (intangible) forms of tradition; and (4) of ecotourism, as a space undisturbed by modern living, with uncontaminated natural beauty (note the involvement of photography, which creates new chronotopes and new layers of image, reality, and interpretation through the tourist gaze). Taken together, these (sub)chronotopic strands index and put into practice the logic of heritage tourism and its tropes (multilayered, but all revolving around peripherality), co-construing an “authentic” local through the commodification of its profound peripherality.

The intertwining of these chronotopes sanctions and “orders” the deployment of more semiotic indexicals into that same stage background design, in the form of a collage of different images on which all the aforementioned thematic titles are inscribed. In this collage, Shui Tian Ba village is seen lying peacefully in the gentle cradle of beautiful mountains. The centre of the panoramic view is occupied by a stretch of lushly green tea fields (tea is a well-known
produce of Xuan’en since two centuries ago). On the left and right edge of the fields, along
the mountains, sit small, tidy clusters of “traditional” farm houses (which were in fact newly
built as part of the local A Thousand Tujia Households project). In the bottom right corner of
the collage, we also find a superimposed image of fully geared (urban) cyclists in action. Un-
doubtedly, these images are carefully selected and chronotopically re-organized into the col-
laged chronotope of the stage background design. The aesthetic depiction of the village ech-
oes and informationally complements the (rural, adventure, cultural, and eco-) forms of herit-
age tourism inscribed in the thematic titles of the occasion. In this they also reaffirm ideologi-
cally the local multiple orientations to the translocal (heritage) authenticity simultaneously
invoked in these titles – we are observing what Blommaert (2005) called “layered simultanei-
ty” here. Shui Tian Ba village is authentic, as it seems, because of the confluence of all of
these elements in that historical-synchronic moment of enactment and observation. The chro-
notopically invoked words, images, and ideas of heritage-as-tourism, as evidenced so far, all
point to authenticity as a romanticized, exoticized, and commodified version of peripherality.
This version of peripherality, as we will see next, is embedded in and mobilized in support of
the overall heritage (thus identity) project of Enshi: the construction of an authentic minority
identity, of the Tujia.

Let us now look at the second aspect of the stage performance, the actual show unfolding
within that chronotope. What is being performed is a dramatized dance called Ten Sisters,
which re-enacts the Tujia tradition of “wedding lament”. This performance is yet another
chronotopic organization, richly semiotized through music, singing, costumes, body move-
ments and storytelling. We see that all dancers are dressed in supposedly Tujia-style costumes
(the “authentic” Tujia costumes are hard to identify; see Wang, 2015). The bride and the
groom are wearing matching red. With her head covered under a red veil, the bride is being
carried away by the groom on his back. The bridesmaids, the other nine of the ten sisters, are
in identical pink dresses. They are lined up behind the couple, crying and waving farewell to
the bride with red handkerchiefs. One of them seems to find it difficult to see off the bride:
she stands by the couple, holding a red umbrella over the bride to shelter her from the sun.
The music is sad and grieving, and the lyrics speak about the bride’s reluctance to leave home
and her gratitude to her mother.
The “invokable histories” of this chronotopic organization, taking the form of dance show, are indexically linked to the state ideology of multiculturalism in China and its imperative for ethnic(ized) minorities presented as the primitive, exotic Other (from the perspective of the Han majority). As discussed earlier, this ideology derives from an essentialized ethnotaxonomy, claiming certain (and sometimes imagined or caricatured) aspects of the past or distinctions as “traditions” and ethnically “unique” heritage, and circulating these as knowledge and truth that transcend timespace. This order of authenticity centering on ethnicity overarches the entire heritage making in Enshi. Although the wedding lament is a (dated) custom once practiced in many (Han and other ethnic) communities in China (and elsewhere), it has been officially attached to the Tujia as part of the group’s assumed timeless, ethnically unique features and cultural heritage. The ritual is re-enacted and chronotopically incorporated into various identity moments to indicate authenticity, such as here on the stage in Shui Tian Ba village, for the thirtieth anniversary of Enshi. In fact, the wedding lament has become a Tujia “classic”; the ritual — or, rather, the idea of it — has been enregistered as part of the local identity repertoire even though the vast majority of the local people have never seen it in its “authentic” form themselves.

The dance performance of Ten Sisters in Shui Tian Ba village is one of the numerous reinterpreted versions of the Tujia wedding lament ritual. Within its own timespace frame as a dance, it artistically and intertextually recycles the official discourse of the “authentic” Tujia. Meanwhile, the dance serves as a focal point of the chronotope generated on the stage: it ties in with the theme “intangible cultural heritage show” written in the stage background design; it delivers that theme through selected multimodal semiosis and, via the stage, opens its semiotization of authenticity to multiple audiences and interpretations. The dancers on this stage are what we might call the “heritagized” body. By being members of the local communities, wearing Tujia-style clothing, and doing the ritual of wedding lament through dancing, the dancers have themselves become the most “authentic” embodiment of Tujia authenticity. The bodies per se and what they can do and represent, in this sense, are called upon as an elemental form of chronotopic resource for achieving that authenticity, thus, an elemental part of the Tujia heritage. This bodily resource is in fact the semiotic axis to all the chronotopes at work. In the same way that it indexes and embodies the essence of Enshi’s heritage project on the whole, i.e. heritage-as-ethnicity, the insertion of the heritagized body onto the stage sets
the footing of the event in Shui Tian Ba village on the local people doing being the authentic Tujia, thus, bringing together all the chronotopes which are organized locally into the front-stage activity of dancing, the stage background design, the heritage-based tourism activities, and, ultimately, the moment of celebration in the village, with the co-presence of performers, audiences, and respondents.

This brings us to the village of Shui Tian Ba as a chronotopic unit in which the celebration event we are examining takes place. As shown in Figure 1, the stage performance described above is part of this chronotope. The mountains of Shui Tian Ba village depicted in the visual collage of the stage background design are right behind it — an authenticating effect to what is happening on the stage and, by extension, to the Tujia heritage projected from that stage. So are the tea fields, the traditional farm houses, and the cyclists. The spatial-temporal locality provides the foundational framework for everything. However, locality is not merely the backdrop outside of things that are happening, it is also designed and brought into the chronotopic organization as a resource.

_A Thousand Tujia Households_ is the local heritage project that has turned Shui Tian Ba village into the ideal(ized) locality for the big celebration. The project was mainly funded by the county government of Xuan’en. Its goal was to make a model village out of Shui Tian Ba showcasing the natural beauty of the mountainous region, the idyllic agrarian lifestyle, and the unique Tujia way of life, focusing on housing — all in all, an “authentic” package of heritage features under the umbrella term of Tujia, which feeds directly into the heritage tourism market and its commodification of Tujia authenticity. We have seen all of these semiotically represented in the stage background design. Not readily visible in that synchronicity is the process of (chronotopic) organization. To achieve the goal, the village has been spatially transformed. The previous paddy fields (the name Shui Tian Ba refers to paddy fields) were replaced with tea fields, concentrated in the centre of the village. New roads and paths were built, with a featuring Dong-style (another ethnic minority group found in Enshi) bridge crossing over the little river that runs through the village. The location and size of the local farm houses were also reorganized, so that they would look tidier and more uniformly recognizable. More interestingly, a proportion of the project funding was spent on revamping these houses to give them an ethnically authentic appearance. This involved re-plastering the exter-
nal walls of many houses to hide their originally tiled facades (an urban trend in Enshi at the time), replacing the aluminum window frames with carved wooden ones, and adding artistic ethnic features to the roofs and eaves of the houses. All these efforts have contributed to the “authentic” locality and are visually connected to “authentic” products found in Shui Tian Ba village.

It may be argued that the production of locality may have paradoxically triggered “artificial authenticity”, therefore, inauthenticity. However, what counts as the original? Is the original the authentic? At what point does an intentional adjustment turn its object into something inauthentic? Answers to such questions are contentious and complex. We prefer to consider the A Thousand Tujia Households project as an example in which the semiotic modification of a chronotopic setting is part of the wider process of striving for a sense of authenticity at different scale-levels; it therefore belongs to the production of authenticity.

To summarize, the example from Shui Tian Ba village illustrates complex chronotopic organizations of different aspects of the Tujia heritage in action. In the format of a stage performance, different timespace frames are mobilized to represent the “authentic” Tujia for the political and the economic purposes. The stage itself becomes multi-chronotopic, in the sense that it generates a nexus of chronotopes, with the Tujia dance performance as its focal point, and the stage background design semiotically mirroring the corporeal surrounding and activities of the occasion. Each of these chronotopic organization brings along its own historical meanings and these chronotopes and meanings merge into a fused whole through the stage setting. In fact, the entire event is chronotopically contextualized by the stage, on which the Tujia heritage is performed — in a double sense of the word: as a theatrical performance, and as an agentive process of semiotization. This performativity aspect, as we have seen, involves notable efforts of “semiotic design” (Wang (2015) illustrates this process with reference to Tujia ethnic costumes in Enshi). Chronotopes examined here are necessarily part of the larger chronotopes of heritage in Enshi, in China, and in globalization. They show that the performance of heritage authenticity, or any identity claim, is organized in relation to multiple timespace frames of meaning making.
3.2 Chronotropic Scaling and Authenticity

We have suggested earlier that scale is a notion that can be used to describe the scope of communicability of chronotopically organized and semiotized behaviors (Blommaert, 2015). If heritage can be observed as such a phenomenon, following our discussion so far, tourism offers a scale at which heritage can be articulated, negotiated, and understood. The scale of tourism mobilizes specific norms, genres, and expectations toward which communication on heritage and its authenticity orients — we have seen these in the case of Enshi being "translated" into the globalized formats of rural, adventure, ethnic, and eco tourism and respective spatiotemporal configurations of local engagements. There are other scales that are prevalent, such as the state’s ethnopolitics of multiculturality, or the local histories and conditions. All these scales inform and shape the way heritage can be performed and developed in an “authentic” way. This suggests that heritage is a profoundly multi-scalar and polycentric process, in which different scales interact with one another, but not always on equal footings. They may come into play at a semiotic, ideological, or discursive level. They may work in parallel, conjoint, competing, or conflicting relations with one another, and in turn involve different contributors and evaluators. The outcome is heteroglossic, a package of multiple meanings and voices. For us, such dynamics and the opportunities, tensions, and transactions they instigate qualify “heritage” as a verb (to echo Street (1993) and Blommaert (2013)).

From this perspective, heritage can be understood as a scaled collective process of meaning making in a given timespace. “Heritaging”, we might say, is a matter of scaling: manoeuvring with the dialectic interplays of the relevant scales to arrive at a sense of authenticity through chronotopically organized “synchronized” activities. This understanding may go some way to explaining our remaining questions on the issue of heritage authenticity we have encountered in Enshi, an issue that appears to be largely about responding to the orders of authenticity at the scale of the globalized heritage tourism and the scale of the state heritage politics. Through the example given above, we have gained insight into the intricate chronotopic organizations of heritage authenticity, and understood that it is within a complex regime of normativities that a range of chronotopes are brought together to explore an important identity opportunity for Enshi. The questions we are left with are: In what way can we actually interpret the local uptake of heritage tourism under these conditions still as an agentive process of
heritaging and, in the end, self-realized authenticity for the community itself? In what way can we keep a balanced view between the conformative and the performative, the staged and the everyday, the authentic and the inauthentic, in order to better account for meaning making in the periphery? To answer these questions we have to return to the genesis of Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture.

The establishment of Enshi’s minority status through its ethnic population of the Tujia was a convoluted story. In the process of nation building after 1949, the Chinese government implemented ethnic classification in order to give recognition to minority groups and to integrate them into a “unified, multinational country”. A large number of the fifty-five minority groups we now know in China were officially identified in the 1950s. Each ethnic group, called minzu, (supposedly) has its own territory, common history, unique language, culture and tradition. However, as Mullaney (2011) shows in his account of this part of Chinese history, the ethnotaxonomy applied at the time had its epistemological, ontological and methodological foundations in Western modernist social scientific beliefs in disciplines such as linguistics and ethnology (and, we could add, its political conversion into a “model state”, the Soviet Union). It was unable to clearly define all ethnic groups according to pre-assumed, fixed categories such as language or specific cultural traits. The Tujia group was not recognized until 1957 because the group had been mixing and living together with other groups; they lacked the obvious cultural features that would make them visibly different from the other groups. Its classification was prompted accidentally when a minority representative of Miao from a town bordering Hunan and Hubei provinces pleaded with the central government to “reclassify” her and her people in Hunan as the Tujia, since their language differed from that of the Miao.

However, whereas areas in Western Hunan were officially recognized in 1957 as Tujia territories, based on the local communities’ self identification and fieldwork conducted by Chinese ethnologists in those areas, their neighbors in Enshi, Western Hubei, did not receive the same recognition. The ethnic classification was soon brought to a halt with the change of political climate in China prefiguring the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when claiming any different identity risked being seen as counter-revolutionary factionism. It was not until after the Cultural Revolution that the ethnic classification was resumed, to address some of the issues left over from two decades ago. Enshi’s case reopened.
Brown (2002) records that when the status re-classification and restoration of the Tujia started in Enshi in the early 1980s, many of the local people were unwilling to “become” Tujia since they “did not have Tujia consciousness” (ibid: 375) and preferred to consider themselves Han. She argues that the categories of ethnic boundary and distinction created by the local government — mainly by genealogical information and history of residence — did not reflect the actual cultural practice and socio-political experience of the individuals; it was a “manipulation” of population statistics based on an artificial dichotomy between Tujia and Han, a tactic of authentication by the local government that was “both economically beneficial and politically safe” for the local populace as a whole (ibid: 389). The disjunction between the state recognition and the local sense of self observed here, illustrates the sensitivity and power dynamics of authenticity in relation to ethnic identity in China — particularly so for Enshi — in which the influence of the state prevails.

In the light of this historical trajectory, we may understand that for Enshi, what heritaging initially invokes is perhaps an uncomfortable sense of inauthenticity rather than authenticity and, consequently, anxiety about how to become authentic. This question is hardly meaningful in terms of daily life at the local scale, since being a Tujia, a Miao, or else was an abstract political status largely detached from the local personal realities in which nearly all the features and evidence of “authenticity”, such as ethnic language, clothing, and customs, are absent, including people’s own ethnic consciousness. The question, until recently, has only been relevant and important at the national scale: how to be seen as authentic in the eyes of the state, of the majorities, and of other minorities. The chronotopes of the local group identity were separated and confined in two disjointed scales of meaning making in terms of heritage. When called upon by the state as a minority, people shift into a “heritage” mode or chronotope of communication, deploying “authentic”, heritage-related semiotic resources. The moment this duty is done, they shift out of it, picking up a different, “inauthentic” set of resources to continue with life at the local level. The contrast and disjunction and the essentializing accusation of inauthenticity they often produce only accentuate the peripheral status of Enshi.
This predicament, however, is now brought in a different light, with globalization and heritage tourism opening up new economic, political, and cultural opportunities for Enshi. Tourism began to take shape in Enshi in the late 1980s, after its reintegration and recognition as a minority region, but only came into full swing less than a decade ago. The old question of “how to play the minzu card” began to merge with the new economic demand, leading to the local strategizing of heritage tourism, with the Tujia (now the largest minority group of Enshi) being positioned as its spearhead. The entrée of a new heritage discourse from the global scale begins to reshape the meaning of authenticity in Enshi. Its natural scenery of steep mountains and local culture have been politically reframed and economically repackaged, turning from an image of wilderness and underdevelopment into one of rare beauty, ecological privilege, nostalgic leisure and bucolic life. This indicates a symbolic shift in the order of authenticity that has historically stigmatized Enshi.

The global template of heritage tourism simultaneously authenticates and de-authenticates heritage. On the one hand, it seeks the “real” local in order to commodify it; on the other hand, it disrupts and “contaminates” the local way of life through translocal encounters and involvements – tourists are by definition not local, “not from here”. This creates scaled chronotopic patterns that re-organize heritage into the (authentic) “timeless-here” in mixture and coordination with the (inauthentic) commodification and re-scrambling of timespace and resources, as we have seen in the example of Enshi. There, it seems, the new order of authenticity at the global scale-level offers scope and chronotopic opportunities to simultaneously articulate heritage authenticity at the national and the local scale-levels: people can fit their previously disjointed “on” and “off” modes of heritage within the one chronotope of heritage tourism. By moving up and mixing scales, they manage to obtain a degree of coherence and sustainability in their dilemma of inauthentic authenticity – heritage is now chronotopically niched.

More important to our understanding about Enshi is the emerging agency involved in this reorganization. The absorption into globalization processes through heritage tourism is subtly transforming the identity making processes for Enshi. The opportunities put forward to the local communities have enabled them to engage with their “given” heritage and the question of “how to become authentic” in a more autonomously active way. This is evidenced in
Enshi’s full orientation toward tourism as a heritage strategy and the political and economic investments it makes accordingly. It is also evidenced in the local commitment to identity opportunities like the one we discussed, through the detailed, layered semiotic manoeuvres to better perform Tujia authenticity; and it is evidenced in the scaling of heritage practices accumulated from such opportunities toward authenticity of optimal potential of recognizability. The efforts are about appropriating these opportunities, as much as about developing an order of authenticity that is locally enacted and translocally meaningful, both stimulate and rely on active semiotic design. It is in these facts that we begin to see an inception of ethnic consciousness in Enshi. In this sense, what we are also witnessing is a contemporary process of ethnogenesis, that is, the invention of the Tujia and of its heritage.

4. Conclusion

Meaning making in the global periphery is infused with complexity. To adequately address that complexity is one the main challenges we are faced with in sociolinguistic studies. Through the case of the Tujia in Enshi, China, it is clear that any critical understanding about the complexity cannot disengage with the structural conditions of peripherality and inequality in which accessibility, communicability, and validity of semiotic resources and their use are embedded. For ethnic minorities such as the Tujia, heritage is a compelling identity discourse with historically loaded and regimented meanings and values. It came with the minority status that was “given” by the state to people in Enshi, marking out their (invented) cultural alterity and geopolitical peripherality. Therefore, what their “own” heritage invokes is not only an unfamiliar (sometimes absent) set of semiotic norms and resources, but also the perpetual ambivalence of (in)authenticity.

This ambivalence re-emerges through heritage tourism as the Tujia engage in processes of globalization. Heritage tourism opens for Enshi an opportunity to commodify their peripherality — which has now become a resource — while addressing the issue of authenticity. By incorporating the notion of chronotope, we are able to ethnographically contextualize and dissect the local identity acts demanded by heritage tourism, but performed simultaneously at multiple scale-levels. It transpires that these acts entail careful semiotization of timespace in
which authenticity is communicated in a spatially and temporally re-organized, re-rationalized order. In this new order of authenticity, the Tujia are able to design and deliver what may be considered authentic for different audiences while gaining economic and political purchase. They are heriting in ways that, previously were mainly meaningful to others, but now are also meaningful for themselves. In this sense, they are becoming Tujia, and their heriting is “producing authenticity” (Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014).

Furthermore, heritage in a globalizing era is better understood as something chronotopically niched. The assumption of heritage as a singular chronotope of “timeless-here” (in crystallized forms of language, clothing, and other cultural traits) can no longer sufficiently explain what counts as authentic or inauthentic (see also Woolard, 2013). That binary view is under challenge in an increasingly polycentric environment in which heriting now operates. The authenticity claims it can make are not simply against the essentialized norm imposed from one centre, but through a complex process that involves semiotic manoeuvring targeting recognizability for multiple centers and scales. Through chronotopic manoeuvring, “fake” acts (which, paradoxically, are often produced for those who consider them as such), such as stage peforming, designing, and commodification, are able to find their own place and validity in heriting, making themselves a coherent and sustainable part of a co-constructed lifeworld. In this way, heritage is renewed, revised, and re-inserted in contemporary life — as part of the ongoing “invention of tradition” in human society (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983).

This, to some extent, makes authenticity a politically more viable course for those in the periphery. As shown in the case of the Tujia, through their agency, peripheral groups are able to — even if symbolically — reclaim authenticity over certain ground, thus, a degree of autonomy over their own identity making. In minute semiotic details of performing heritage, we detect that the centre-periphery relation is being locally contested and reworked, from which cultural change is emerging. However, we must also avoid the over-generalization that those in the periphery are free from the structural inequality that circumscribes their authenticity. As our study suggests, the production of a new order of authenticity is still largely situated in a peripheral cultural and political economy, based on patterns and resources defined by the center. Its own authenticity, therefore, has not escaped “the cunning of recognition” (Povinelli, 2002) within globalization.
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