

Tourism, Anthropology and China

Review >
China

Tourism, Anthropology and China links a variety of perspectives on tourism and anthropological approaches in a colourful constellation of views on in-outsider relations with regards to culture. This highly readable collection of papers is based on the proceedings of a conference on 'Anthropology, Tourism, and Chinese Society' held at Yunnan University in the autumn of 1999 in Kunming, Yunnan Province (South-West China).

ious state agents intentionally create a particular sense of perceiving history, ethnic diversity, and nationhood. The last three papers deal with the possibilities of preserving culture by using income generated by tourism. The papers of Ian Chaplin on Macanese culture in post-Portuguese Macau, and Johan Nilsson and Tan Ying on Quanzhou (Fujian Province) show that tourism and economic development promote heritage preservation, while Heather Peters discusses ways of raising money, exemplified by her case study of the Naxi in Lijiang.

The purpose of the book, according to its editor Tan Chee-Beng, is to show how tourism brings about a reconstruction of local culture. These representations, according to Bruner, rely on credibility, rather than on authenticity, while fixing those images in the past. The editor points out the need for paying more attention to the study of tourism and ethnic expression, rather than just concentrating on the effects of tourism on ethnic groups (p. 18). In other words, the culture of ethnic minorities is not to be regarded as a static object, something to be revered, but as part and parcel of an economy in high need of development. Therefore the editor encourages observers of tourism and ethnic minorities in China to carefully weigh preservation and ethnicity against development and tourism (p. 19).

Nevertheless, throughout the book I was disturbed by the idea that a large gap exists between the anthropological views of the editor and those of some of the main authors of the book. The highly critical descriptions (by authors in parts one and two) of the process of reconstruction and representation of local culture, and the role played in it by the state, seem to be regarded by Tan Chee-Beng, Yang Hui, and Bai Lian as a recipe for the enterprise of trading local culture. This is probably due to a combination of an evolutionary perspective, which regards the coming of a Chinese version of modernity as inevitable and – what I call – a postmodern instrumentalism. Here the postmodern notion of the 'active local agent' is equated with its political and economic role of ethnic minorities in state planning. The book, therefore, could be improved by the addition of a theoretical framework in which the clash of interests of ethnic minorities and the state can be understood.

The book's main merit lies in its diversity, covering general notions such as the representation of human groups, authenticity, nostalgia, modernity, and development, and more problem-related topics such as the effects of tourism on ethnic minorities, the exoticism of ethnicity generated by tourism, and the need for heritage preservation. ◀

– Tan Chee-Beng, Sidney C.H. Cheung, and Yang Hui (eds.), *Tourism, Anthropology and China*, Studies in Asian Tourism, No. 1, Bangkok: White Lotus Press (2001), pp. 334, ISBN 974-7534-62-2.

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Zhonghua Ethnic Park (Zhonghua Minzuyuan) in the north of Beijing. It displays '40 ethnic landscapes, 100 scenic views, 200 ethnic buildings, 100,000 pieces of historic and cultural relics, 300 special theme exhibitions, 1,000 kinds of ethnic commodities, 200 kinds of ethnic delicacies, and 800 staff members of national minority groups.'

By Margaret Sleeboom

Next to *Tourism in China: Geographic, Political and Economic Perspectives* (1995), (edited by Alan Lew and Lawrence Yu), *Tourism and Cultural Development in East Asia and Oceania* (1997) (edited by Shinji Yamashita, Kadir Din, and J.S. Eades), and *Tourism and Modernity in China* (1998) (by Tim Oakes), it is valuable as a rare study of tourism in China in English. Whereas China forms the location of research for the majority of papers, aspects of tourism in Kenya, Southeast Asia, and Japan are also dealt with. Treating society- and culture-related topics this book is interesting to both students of the social sciences and Asian Studies.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first – theoretical – part, Edward M. Bruner discusses the issue of representation, showing how different agencies, ranging from state to private enterprises and indigenous communities, may be involved in representing particular kinds of exhibits (cultures, ethnic minorities, historical sites) to different categories of tourists, notably domestic and foreign tourists. Eric Cohen urges a comparative approach, exemplified by his study of the politics of representation by the state and by Nelson Graham's discussion of nostalgia for tradition and nature in China and Japan. Graham emphasizes that nostalgia does not necessarily indicate a desire to return to the past, but may be a wish to re-experience certain aspects of the past. Han Min's conception of tourist nostalgia for Mao Zedong presents people's feelings for a specific time as meaningful to their present life.

Among the articles, Eileen Walsh's fieldwork-based article on the myth of matriarchy among the Mosuo is outstanding.

Its criticism of representations of the Mosuo as a model matriarchy is a timely warning against naïve interpretations of ethnic culture in Yunnan, used by, for instance, the international symposium on 'Female anthropology and matriarchal culture in the women-dominating kingdom around the Lugu Lake' (8–12 March 2003, see www.Lugu-Lake.com).

Part two deals with business and tourism. The chapter on the myth of matriarchy among the Mosuo and the legend of Ashima, by Eileen Rose Walsh, and the one on the legendary Sani woman portrayed in the Stone Forest, by Margaret Byrne Swain, show how myth is good for business, while Jean A. Berlie points out some negative effects of ethnic tourism on the local Dai culture in Dehong, namely the destruction

of local culture. Rather cynically, Charles F. McKhanns points out that those who lament the loss of Naxi culture are the same ones that encourage their children to speak Chinese at home and regard their *dongba* rituals as backward.

The role of the state in encouraging tourism as a tool of local economic development is the focus of part three. According to Xu Xinjian's study of the Chuanqing people of Guizhou, officially listed as an 'undefined ethnic group', the state is very much involved in identifying ethnic culture for promotion, encouraging the use of ethnic identity as an instrument of attaining economic progress. In this sense minority peoples have become active subjects, capable of exploiting both tourism and ethnic identity to their own ends. Yang Hui and colleagues show how opening up Dai villages inevitably leads to 'modernizing' influences such as karaoke, the reconstruction of Dai dances, and the sale of fake works, while Bai Lian shows how Manchu associations in Shenyang capitalize on tourism to project their 'discovered' identity.

How can tourism go hand in hand with heritage preservation and development? This question is dealt with in part four. C.H. Cheung's study of Hong Kong tourism shows how var-

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