

BOOK REVIEW

Asia on Tour: Exploring the Rise of Asian Tourism

Tim Winter, Peggy Teo and T.C. Chang, editors 2009. Abingdon-England, Routledge.

The exponential growth of Asian tourism in the recent decade has garnered increasing research interests and it is this edited text that triggers a fresh departure in the discussion of the subject filled up with many interesting and meditation-worthy sub-topics. Successfully working on varied perspectives mainly through the deployment of the interpretative approach, contributors to the book indeed have offered outstanding insight and depth in their discerning critical accounts. The meaningful storytelling and analytical discussions lie for the most part on Asian tourists with implications spanning widely from social, cultural to political interests and arenas. Amidst the backdrop of the rise of Asian tourism, the exploration of an array of themes has been conducted to include the distinct cultural and historical features that constitute unique Asian tourism experience (part I, chapter 2-5), the emerging markets thriving on “innovative” tourism products that feed both the Asian tourists and those in other continents given their tastes, needs and expectations (part II, chapter 6-10), the underlying ties linking tourism and the broader socioeconomic development of Asian nations in their transformations from simple tourist-centered destinations to well-projected tourism-based pedestals encouraging new ways of thinking towards modernization, civilization, commercialization and globalization (part III, chapter 11-15), the mobilized heritages that are deeply rooted in Asian countries’ cultures and politics alike (part IV, chapter 16-19) and the rationale of tourism with respect to its capability of reconfiguring physical, social and cultural space in Asia (part V, chapter 20-23). Superficially different, chapters in each part converge to a certain extent in disseminating the theme in point with illustration of evidence and examples in discrete contexts. This book departs from chapter 1, which presents as a clearly summarized introduction, and ends with chapter 23, which reiterates the importance of researching on the subject of Asian tourism and demonstrates its stance to pave the avenue for future studies.



In total, this book consists of 23 chapters displayed in five parts. Each chapter is considered a separate paper with foci drawing upon at least one nation/destination to enunciate a theme. Specified in the discourses includes ten nations that showcase core values and themes to the benefit of readers who of interests, on the one hand, in their historical and cultural backgrounds, and on the other hand, in the manifestations and representations in relation to their domestic and international tourism consumption. The documentation of *Cambodia* in *chapter 4* was designed to highlight the aesthetics of material culture which plays its part to revive and rejuvenate Asian tourism. The critical account of *Singapore* in *chapter 6* provides the existence of transculturation due to the fact that the boutique hotels with colonial histories have been re-inscribed with postcolonial reflections catering to “niche markets and segmented/[hybrid] interests” (p. 83). The truth of *Thailand* tourism found in *chapter 7* and *chapter 17* concentrates on the appearance of the medical tourism which proffers a combination of “sea, sun, sand and surgery” (p. 97), and on the tourism functionality in understanding cultural diversity and transferring an internal cultural adverse confrontation to a nationwide mutualism, respectively. The empirical studies of the film-induced tourism in *Korea* in *chapter 8* have witnessed the upsurge of inbound tourism in recent years in part owing to the cinematic affect entwined with on-site authentic confirmation-natured feelings of the tourists. In terms of the excavation of *India* tourism, four chapters have relevance. *Chapter 7* depicts the blossoming medical tourism generally and *chapter 10*, in particular, stresses tourism in Kerala driven by both indigenous and foreign ardor of Ayurvedic medical treatments; *chapter 9* posits short cultural distance with shared Asian traits as the driven force for travel from source countries to destinations within Asia; *chapter 16* reads like a propaganda of the governments’ efforts centering on the pivotal role of tourism in the economic reconstruction and political stability of the valley of Kashmir. In studying *Indonesia*, in *chapter 12*, it is noted that “tourism glitters in different ways in plans and policies” (p. 181). *Chapter 13* exhibits prominence to the leading place of *Japan* in Asia which sees an inoculation and transplantation of foreign experiences in order to internationalize domestic tourism. Tourism in *Vietnam* has been analyzed in *chapter 14* and tourism in *Laos* has been examined in *chapter 20*.

Other than the foregoing nations, China appears under the spotlight scattered in seven chapters throughout the book (*chapter 5, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, and 22*). The discourses have penetrated into cross-sections of various aspects in China. It is noted that the development of modern tourism in China parallels the state visions and policies of nurturing socialist

spiritual civilization and that of establishing new socialist countryside. The prosperity of tourism in both domestic and outbound markets stimulates, to a more or less extent, the progress of purposefully creating modern citizenry and transforming into contemporary lifestyles in an ever-increasingly liberalized environment. Similarly, the protection of cultural heritages has been implemented in a way in line with wider state interests, for example, that the Potala in Tibet has been claimed to be significant because of “the joint technical and aesthetic achievements of the peoples of China, not of the separate nation of Tibet” (p. 258). In the mean time, the civilization armed with the widespread use of the Internet in present-day China propels social interactions among segmented groups of people sharing core values and ethos in, for instance, backpacking tourism behavior. The investigation of gastronomy for Hong Kong society and the socio-cultural enquiry of photographic experiences for Taiwanese tourists have given more credit to the mobility and modernity of tourism practices in Greater China Regions. These pieces of research have collectively demonstrated the interplay of political interests, tourists’ demand and outsiders’ concerns, in the context of China.

This well-edited text contains both quantitative and qualitative methods which are thought complementary to each other for the understandings of tourism facts in Asia. The emphasis on the latter with the use of interpretative approach in the book satisfies the needs to investigate tourism knowledge constructed by Asian novice tourists and within emerging tourism markets. Characterized in the approach is ethnography with its widely-recognized ability to interpret human behavior in its cultural and social settings (Echtner & Jamal, 1997). This method is pertinent to field studies with on-site observations with help of in-depth qualitative interviews, which have been utilized across themes and chapters. The author of each chapter constantly articulated the theory to apply and the research method to employ. For example, in chapter 5, Chan Yuk Wah studied China’s outbound tourism with an explicit announcement at the beginning that “I employ the concept of ‘disorganized tourism space’ to illustrate and analyze...” and “the ethnographic data in this chapter was collected over a span of four years” (p. 67). Another supporting evidence could be found in chapter 8 in seeking the truth of film-induced tourism in Korea when the author Youngmin Choe enunciated that “I draw on theories of cinematic affect and affectation to examine....”and “through an inter-textual approach combining close readings of the films, supplementary footage documenting tourists at film-induced tour sites, and analyses gathered from on-site observation methods, I show...” (p. 110).

Nevertheless, this book is limited by merely including and examining the examples occurring in Eastern, Southern and Southeastern Asian countries carrying corresponding cultural values and ideologies, while forgetting the actuality of ongoing growth of tourism in Russia, Western and Central Asian countries and the significance of conducting research on it. It seemed that the captured countries, particularly China and India with the largest population and immense potential of speedy tourism development, are able to speak for the whole of Asia. There is no denying indicating that the cultural and social complicacy exists apparently amongst different parts of the wide-ranging Asian continent. At the conceptual level, while not so much attention has been given to the Asian countries/destinations excluded in this book, there is no reason to disregard the Middle East tourism markets tormented by endless disasters, for example, Israel (Beirman, 2002). In addition, the burgeoning medical tourism industry in Dubai (Connell, 2006) should have also been admitted to bring out the broader and deeper understandings of the subject in point. Russia, in northern Asia, as well awaits research concerning its tourism, especially when Burns (1998) called for detailed field studies to underline the resurgence in ethnicity.

Despite the aforementioned limitation, the overall quality of this book is at high level. All the thematic chapters in five parts are evidently committed to corroborating the solid truth of the rise of Asian tourism as the title suggests. The book can be considered a successful conscious attempt to make the academic community parallel the reality in Asian tourism. The addition of phonetic translations in the language of the nation in question beside some pinpointed terms in the contexts exerts easy reference for the readers who master the language. The conclusion section written by Tim Winter clarifies the future direction of recasting tourism theory in Asian tourism in concomitance with six straightforward suggestions. Relying upon the benefits generated from this book, researchers should have more confidence in attempt to frame the growth and vivacity of Asian tourism, being still less familiar territory.

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Jing (Bill) Xu

Jing (Bill) Xu (hmbill.xu@polyu.edu.hk), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, PRC, 9 New Science Museum Road, TST-East, Kowloon.