

BOOK REVIEW

Heritage Tourism in China: Modernity, Identity and Sustainability, by Hongliang Yan, Channel View Publications, 2017, £99.95 (hbk), ISBN 978-1845415938 / £33.67 (ebk-Kindle), ASIN: B01MUGINIZ

China is a nation with a long history and is ranked the second in the world in terms of number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The rapid economic growth of the country, however, has often been associated with the deterioration of the physical and cultural environment. The discussions on the relationship between planning and representation of heritage for tourism development and the notions of modernity, sustainability, and identity in a Chinese context are thus of great academic and practical interest.

The book consists of an introduction and 7 chapters. As stated by the author, the book results from many years of personal research and work. It is presented with different chapters serving as different components of a research project, such as the literature review, the studied context, the findings and conclusions. Notably, a conceptual framework is introduced as a guideline for the research. The framework successfully provides a comprehensive overview of the book's content, the issues/concepts being discussed, as well as their interrelationships. The first four chapters introduce major concepts of interest, including modernity, identity, sustainability, Chinese philosophy and tourism governance. The studied context and selected heritage sites are also presented. The core of the book can be found in the chapters 5 and 6, where actual discussions of modernity, identity building and sustainable development within China heritage tourism are presented. The concluding chapter finally evaluates the conceptual framework and discusses the values of the empirical research presented in the book.

Considering the book's title alluding to Heritage Tourism in China, I was expected to be confronted with flagship Chinese heritage sites, such as the Great Wall or the Forbidden City. The book, somewhat surprisingly, focuses on the Shan Dong Province and studies four local major heritage sites, including Qufu (World Heritage Site), Mount Tai (World Heritage Site), the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War memorials, and the Taiqing Taoist Temple. The sites are comprised of different types of heritages, including cultural, natural and war-related heritage. The focus on less popular heritage sites and the interesting combination of heritage types makes the book a motivating and unconventional read.

The book has successfully highlighted various problems of utilizing heritage for tourism purpose including modernity, commodification, authenticity, identity building and sustainable development in the contemporary China. Planning and development of heritage tourism in China is described to be a political process: a government tool to build national identity and speed up China's modernization. On the other hand, environmental and cultural concerns are said to be disregarded in the national policies. The author also identifies different, contesting views of public authorities and other stakeholders towards China's modernization, its representation through heritage tourism, as well as towards the sustainable development of cultural and natural heritage tourism. This is not unique in the

context of developing countries, yet the evidence and vivid illustrations given through the four studied sites in contemporary China are an intriguing read.

It is worth mentioning that discussions are presented from the viewpoints of policy makers and other influential stakeholders with interest in Chinese heritage tourism and the studied heritage sites. While the main topics presented are modernity, identity building and sustainable development, it can be said that the underlying theme of the book is in fact tourism governance. As a consequence, much of the discussion is linked to the influence of Chinese political systems onto the planning and development of heritage tourism. The “Economic Reform and Open Door’ Policies” are also mentioned multiple times. Chinese traditional (Confucianism, Taoism) and political philosophies’ influences on the contemporary society, tourism development and heritage tourism are also brought into context.

Considering the above, the book is suitable for researchers and graduate students interested in areas such as heritage tourism, planning/governance, national identity building through heritage attractions, heritage commodification, heritage authenticity, and tourism development and politics, particularly in the context of China. The book is considered a good source of academic reference, as it results from a long and rigorous research project. As such, it offers a thorough literature review of major relevant concepts, a comprehensive conceptual framework and numerous interviews with different stakeholders of the studied sites. It is noteworthy that the content related to identity building, modernization, governance and planning of Chinese heritage tourism may also appeal to general audiences interested in Chinese heritage. On the downside, the book’s rigorously academic writing style may reduce its attractiveness to this specific group of readers.

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