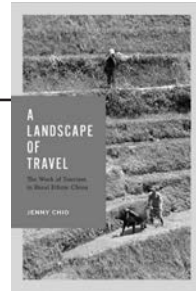


## BOOK REVIEW

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Jenny T. Chio, *A Landscape of Travel: The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014. 304 pp.

In *A Landscape of Travel: The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China*, Jenny Chio skillfully unpacks the complexities of ethnic-tourism development in rural China. Based on substantial ethnographic fieldwork in Ping'an (a Zhuang village in Guangxi) and Upper Jidao (a Miao village in Guizhou), she lays bare the regimes of mobility and visibility that turn one person's leisure into another person's labor. Situating her research within the "hosts and guests" framework (Smith 1989), Chio criticizes the overemphasis on tourists in tourism studies. Instead, her work focuses on the residents of village destinations. More precisely, she disentangles the discourses and practices of those who "do the work" of tourism, thereby blurring the fine line between "hosts" and the often-neglected intermediary category of tourism service providers.

In the preface and introduction to the book, Chio gives readers more information about the theoretical and methodological tools that she uses. Her main analytical focus on "doing tourism" examines a landscape of travel, in which "the act and the imagination of travel become key nodes through which tourists, migrants, ethnic minorities, mainstream majorities, rural villagers, and urban dwellers negotiate and make sense of current social, economic, and political conditions" (xvii). As "a conceptual framework for tracing social relations," this landscape of travel "illuminates the complex networks of ambitions, expectations, and opportunities that are shaping transformations" (14). Such an approach allows Chio to zoom in on two fundamental social processes that shape the "work" of tourism, namely human mobility (particularly tourism and migration) and visibility (the social fact of vision).

Chapter 1 sketches the larger context of Chio's case studies. It describes the history of tourism and the current conditions in both villages, and discusses broader issues of ethnic identity and visual representations of ethnicity in China. This reveals the lasting importance of imaginaries of "difference," a point that has also been made by other anthropologists of tourism (e.g., Salazar and Graburn 2014). The construction of ethnic minorities in China involves a continuous "process of negotiation between national, mainstream, local, and individual imaginations and aspirations" (34). The way this plays out in the development of tourism in both field sites, however, is slightly dissimilar. Whereas in Ping'an the beautiful views of the Longsheng rice terraces are the primary tourist focus, Upper Jidao was developed from the very beginning as an ethnic tourism destination.

In the second chapter, Chio discusses "tourism as development," or the tight connection between rural household-based tourism enterprises (*nong jia le*, or "family business happiness") and general Chinese policies for rural development (particularly the campaign to build a New Socialist Countryside). Both formed part of "an effort to increase rural incomes and also to raise the *suzhi* [quality] of ethnic minorities by modernizing them" (98). Moreover, both aimed at curbing rural-to-urban migration and encouraging villagers to stay, or return, home. After all, domestic migrant workers in China continue to be regarded by many as "low quality" (92). By discussing tourism in the larger frame of national development policies (to keep the rural population "in place"), Chio nicely illustrates here how "tourism in China was bound tightly with explicit attempts to construct a new Chinese countryside, a new Chinese tourist, and a new rural Chinese subject" (97).

Chapter 3 focuses on mobility, which Chio defines as "both the ability to travel and...all of the attendant desires and notions of agency associated with this capacity to envision travel as a socially significant element of one's subjectivity and life experiences" (102). Through rich ethnographic description, we learn how rural migrants see and understand tourism and development in their villages. The chapter's title, "Leave the Fields Without Leaving the Countryside," refers to a Chinese slogan that promotes the idea of (rural) modernity without mobility. In other words, rural tourism development in China is based on the binary assumption of mobile urban tourists versus immobile rural villagers. Chio's "orders of mobility" reveal "particular desires, inequalities, and power relations"

(106), and have been described elsewhere in the literature as “regimes of mobility” (Schiller and Salazar 2013).

Since Chio is a visual anthropologist, it is no surprise the visual aspects of tourism receive a fair share of attention in her book. In particular, the fourth chapter looks at the visual work of “doing” tourism. This includes an analysis of material or physical changes related to buildings (turning them into guesthouses and hotels), landscapes (prioritizing the maintenance of the most scenic ones), and people (the presence of migrant ethnic-minority models for tourist photography). The “politics of appearance” that create the expected/imagined “difference” resonate with older concepts such as “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973). In this context, it is somewhat surprising that Chio does not engage with the emerging anthropological literature on the power of “tourism imaginaries” (cf. Salazar and Graburn 2014).

Chapter 5 returns to an in-depth discussion of the issue of “difference,” and the consequences that “distancing work” has for the relationships between residents, villages, and other stakeholders involved in tourism development, predominantly in the context of intervillage and intravillage relationships. Paradoxically, rural tourism development seems to alienate (or differentiate) people from one another while, at the same time, making their lives and livelihoods more interconnected. Chio describes three types of distance: “distance in time (suggesting evolutionary, linear time and progress), distance in space (which is often apprehended visually in the built environment), and distance in culture (including categories of the exotic, the unusual, or even the unexpected)” (184). In addition, rural ethnic tourism in China is experienced and expressed along three binary axes of difference: “rural–urban, ethnic minority–mainstream majority, and poor–rich” (204). These distances and differences, clearly at play in the two villages under study, provide the guiding outlines of the landscape of travel in China today. Inclusion of some of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) insights regarding processes of “distinction” could have enriched the discussion here.

Through tourism, the two communities studied by Chio found ways of asserting, and contesting, their places in contemporary China. In the conclusion of the book, Chio recounts her (failed) experiment of bringing people from the two field sites together during a study tour (in order to learn how tourism was “done” in another village). Reflecting upon this fieldwork experience, Chio stresses how, for the villagers, “the end goal

of tourism is to construct not only a better place to tour but also, and more important, a better place to live” (231). However, Chio reminds us, “as a lived experience, tourism is a messy business in which individual aspirations may collide with communal plans” (210). Deeply entangled in tourism are “intricate interdependencies between ethnicity, imagery, economy, and travel that shape rural social lives and livelihoods” (231).

In all, *A Landscape of Travel* is a beautifully written, accessible, and engaging ethnographic monograph. At the same time, the thematic thread connecting the various chapters is not always as pronounced as it could be. The clever analytical combination of a mobilities perspective with a visual anthropology lens leads to some truly original and innovative insights. Through this book, the reader becomes acquainted with the inner workings of tourism development in rural China. However, those with a background in tourism studies will undoubtedly note the many similarities with tourism development elsewhere in the world (cf. Scott and Selwyn 2010). With few exceptions, the comparisons made in this monograph remain limited to China. While the power of national policies on local realities is documented in great detail, Chio could have paid a bit more attention to the growing influence of transnational dynamics. For instance, China has become one of the prime players in the “appropriation” (not to say manipulation) of UNESCO’s material and intangible heritage listings.

In sum, with this monograph Chio has put herself firmly on the academic map, both as an expert in the anthropology of tourism and as a visual anthropologist (especially when her book is read alongside the related documentary, *Peasant Family Happiness* [Chio 2013]). I recommend *A Landscape of Travel* to students and scholars alike who want to learn more about the sophisticated mechanisms of mobility and visibility through which villages and villagers engage with tourism in China and beyond. ■

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