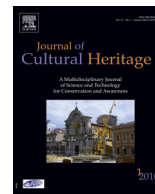




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Book review

A Landscape of Travel, J. Chio. The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China, University of Washington Press, Seattle & London (2014). 294 pp., \$..

"*A Landscape of Travel*". This somehow cryptic and sophisticated title hides a very scientifically sound research done by an anthropologist. Jenny Chio has focused her research work on the two small village communities of Ping'an and Upper Jidao of southern China, where she conducted for more than two years her fieldwork, with the aim, living with them, to understand and analyze how tourism has affected rural ethnic minority villages. With this question in mind our trip starts.

Reading her book, we discover however:

- the role played by the "New Socialist Countryside" policy, incorporated in the Five Year Plan (2006–2010), in order to create through tourism new opportunities in the countryside with the scope to convince rural work force to remain or return home, thus, addressing the pressing internal migration issue;
- the many ways with which this new Chinese national policy has been implemented (training courses, public works, travel guides, tourist bureau, advertisements, etc.); its ideological-political background (based on the Ethnic Classification project of 1949); and its sociological and economic-political implications (such as "the commodification and mediatization of ethnic and rural identities");
- the material (economic, heritage preservation, landscape planning) and sociological-anthropological consequences this policy and tourist flows had on the villagers' lives and understanding. In this context, the author highlights the villagers' attention to "do tourism", that is "to do the work of tourism successfully", which is a very revealing understanding useful as an approach to the study of other realities also in urban Europe!
- the close relationship, yet not always understood and studied, between labor and leisure – in reference to tourism – and between migration and tourism – in reference to travel. The book, thus, introduces a more integrated analysis interlinking labor, leisure, tourism and migration; an approach, which ends up involving the urban–rural debate in China and the relative majority-minority ethnic cultures.

But the book's surprises do not end here.

According to the author for the village residents, the success of their local tourist industry, depended on their capacity to correspond tourist expectations, which meant to "be seen" both as a scenic photographic setting and as an ethnic minority rural milieu in its daily life. These "politics of appearance" (defined also by the "New Socialist Countryside" policy) determine "who and what looks appropriately ethnic and rural enough for tourism and tourists, and village residents by necessity have had to learn how to work within these changing expectations". Architectural renovations of homes becoming guest houses, landscaping enhancement

of agricultural fields to become photographic settings, the employment of local or migrant villagers as ethnic minority models, are some of the aspects of "doing tourism" as "visual" work.

Jenny Chio's book, as the subtitle explains, "*The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China*", is not a book on tourist experience of traveling, but on "doing tourism" by rural ethnic Chinese village residents. Focusing on how village residents make sense of their livelihoods in tourist village destinations the author examines the social process and illuminates the aspect that in tourism one person's leisure is another's labour.

This innovative approach of dealing with tourism is further enhanced, as already mentioned, by the author's methodology to research the subject by investigating on the link of mobility and visibility. Her background, as anthropologist and visual ethnographer, allows her to explore the double ended process of rural to urban migration and urban to rural tourism as well as the "politics of appearance" offering a complex understanding on how doing tourism is entrenched with the identities of the rural villagers "as modern rural and ethnic minority Chinese citizens".

Such a stimulating and fascinating book represents a good read not only for experts or a broader public interested in China, tourism and cultural heritage preservation, but also for researchers in contemporary visual culture, ethnography and migration.

Jenny Chio's insights and methodological innovations, however, go far beyond. They shake all our analytical certainties and reveal the necessity for an all encompassing integrated evaluation (surpassing the bipolar analysis of leisure-labour, migrant-tourism). This sounds as an invitation to all researchers on tourism, independently of their disciplinary background (anthropology, ethnography, geography, history, economics, architecture, cultural studies, heritage conservation, sociology, politics, etc.) to integrate the two major characteristics of tourism – that she identifies as visibility and mobility – and to investigate on their effects not only in relation to tourists but also with regard to the hosting societies. On these grounds, becomes also clear the cryptic significance of the book's title – "*A Landscape of Travel*" – as a space imprinted and transformed by the different travel routes of tourists and migrants.

Given the role of tourist industry as a new global economic power both in forming contemporary identities and in transforming traditional heritage values, Chio's book results very timely, not only for better understanding Chinese society and identity building but also ours.

Heleni Porfyriou
 National Research Council of Italy, Institute for the
 Conservation and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage,
 Rome, Italy

E-mail address: heleni.porfyriou@cnr.it

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