enslaved populations. The brevity of these chapters, and their strange placement near the end of the book (despite their “chronological location” at the beginning of the story), regrettably implies that their inclusion was an afterthought. This book is very strong in its discussion of the history of types of green spaces and influences on their design in a unique city, but the last five sections of the book seem list-like and encyclopedic without developed connections to the first (and strongest) part of the book.

Amy Sumpter is an assistant professor of geography at Georgia College. Her interests include racial and ethnic geographies as well as cultural and economic geographies of the US South.

A Landscape of Travel: The Work of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China

By Jenny Chio


Reviewed by Steven L. Driever, drievers@umkc.edu, Department of Geosciences, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO 64110

Studies of tourism usually focus on tourists, but Jenny Chio, an anthropologist, explores a less commonly discussed side of the subject: how rural ethnic villagers in China “do tourism” by making their villages distinctive and attractive to others while maintaining a level of profitability that outweighs the temptation to migrate to a city in search of economic opportunity. She places village residents in a landscape of travel where visuality and mobility are key criteria. Visuality, as defined by Chio, is the external appearance of tourist elements such as buildings, native dress, and agricultural fields. Mobility is how the villagers acquire their knowledge and skills to make themselves, their villages, and surroundings worthy of tourism. Chio’s landscape of travel, therefore, encompasses physical alterations of the observable and social changes dealing with the politics of personal identity, leisure, and labor. Her landscape is a cultural medium, shaped by human intervention that is largely independent of the observer’s intentions.

This book deals mainly with two case studies: Ping’an, a Zhuang village in Guangxi Province, and Upper Jidao, a Miao village in Guizhou Province. She did extensive fieldwork in these two villages for one and a half years, starting in 2006. Ping’an has been engaged in tourism since the late 1970s as part of the Guilin Longji Terraced Fields Scenic Area, a slice of China that is packed with tourist destinations. Most tourists to Ping’an have been drawn there by the photographic possibilities of the surrounding rice terraces. To get tourists more engaged in the village itself, Ping’an residents had to find ways to make their Zhuang ethnicity more visually appealing. Upper Jidao, on the other hand, is part of a tourist destination area centered on Miao ethnicity. Tourists overlooked visiting the small village until the World Bank in 2002 provided a seed grant for the production of a tourism master plan for the Bala River area of Guizhou that was then implemented by several
international and national tourism agencies. Upper Jidao was a demonstration project within the Bala River area.

China is a highly structured state at all levels of governance. The state has identified and enumerated the ethnic minorities in a classification system that is necessarily imperfect and rather arbitrary. For example, the Miao ethnic “group” is widely scattered geographically and Miao members speak different languages. The official list of 56 ethnic groups (including the majority, Han), nevertheless has become one of the lynchpins of central planning. The 18th Five Year Plan (2006-10) was accompanied by the year of “China Rural Tourism.” Chinese officials sought to develop rural areas in order to slow rural-to-urban migration and provide leisure outlets for city dwellers. In chapter two, Chio discusses the “New Socialist Countryside” that was to foster peasant family happiness (nong jia le), a condition in which rural villages would appeal to Han tourists by providing attractive lodging, tasty local food, and ethnic folk entertainment. The problem with this goal, as Chio makes clear, is that villagers pursuing tourism tend to follow the same formula: don festival dress, perform traditional song and dance routines, and sell similar handicrafts (usually articles of ethnic clothing).

Chio devotes the third chapter to migrants and migration. Whereas the Chinese government prefers that the peasants remain in the village, hundreds of millions have left for employment in big cities. The author examines how the migrants’ ethnic identity is affected and how they came to view their villages’ efforts to attract tourists. In the course of interviewing and filming five returned migrants, she finds that they became more knowledgeable about what services tourists want and how best to deliver them. Such returnees, many of whom ultimately leave the village for good, are the main impetus for realizing the government’s goal of higher quality residents occupying tidy villages in a New Socialist Countryside that is peaceful and harmonious. Under the surface, however, there are tremendous interpersonal conflicts and rivalries in tourism villages undergoing rapid change.

In the fourth chapter, Chio turns to what she terms “the politics of appearance.” To attract tourists, the villagers must restyle themselves and their communities. Buildings must be of wood, or at least veneered with wood to appear attractively rustic. Inside, guesthouses must have modern facilities, such as separate bathrooms with sit-down toilets. Surrounding agricultural fields must be made attractive to create scenic sites capable of being captured in trophy photographs. In Ping’an, the main challenge has been to find enough people to maintain the rice terraces in an attractive state throughout the year; few want to contribute the necessary labor. A secondary challenge has been maintenance of the minority model business, with most of the models (all young women) coming from other villages and dressing up as Zhuang, whether of that ethnicity or not. Chio does not consider such visualizations as inauthentic, but rather to be part of the process of enhancing knowledge of the ethnic self and the tourist other.

The last substantive chapter deals with interpersonal networks that affect local lives and livelihoods in unintended ways. She documents how some residents in Lower Jidao, not targeted for tourism development, would try to sabotage the
budding tourism of adjacent Upper Jidao by slashing advertising posters and blocking roads. The latter is a common tactic in rural tourist spots in China when peasants do not think they are getting their fair share of ticket proceeds. Residents in Upper Jidao, who felt excluded from the possible tourism bonanza, retaliated by smashing public urinals. The state has raised the overall standard of living in tourism villages, but at the same time has increased disparities in wealth among villagers. Alienation among the less fortunate has been exacerbated by outside investors building luxury hotels from which locals other than employees have been excluded.

The final chapter, "Conclusion," is almost entirely devoted to her invitation of members of the Upper Jidao Tourism Association to accompany her in 2007 on a visit to Ping'an. Chio wanted to observe the interaction between the two sets of villagers. Although the tourism leaders in Ping’an were uninterested in meeting the Upper Jidao visitors, the latter still found the experience of being a tourist enriching. The book ends with updating tourism events in the two villages to 2012. The actual conclusion is Spartan: that tourism is enmeshed in a landscape of travel consisting of complex relationships, and labor as well as leisure.

Although the author has a good grasp of the theories concerned with tourism throughout the world, this book will appeal most to those readers curious about tourism development among ethnic minority villages in China. Her empirically based discussion, based on extensive fieldwork and subsequent visits can sometimes be discursive and repetitive, but she undoubtedly is the scholarly authority on the recent transformation of the two villages highlighted.

Steven L. Driever is Professor of Geography in the Department of Geosciences, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO 64110. His research interests include the geography of tourism and travel as well as the historical geography of cities.

Saving Lake Tahoe: An Environmental History of a National Treasure

By Michael J. Makley


Reviewed by Catherine S. Chan, catschan@hkbu.edu.hk, College of International Education, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Natural landscapes have long been eroded in physical form and practical utility as a result of industrial development and human behavior, marked by an ironic blend of resource exploitation and scenic appreciation. In the late 1960s, the emergence of environmental concern steered the conventional benchmark of aesthetics away from the arts toward the quotidian, situating landscape aesthetics in the same plate as moral ethics. Thus, instead of acknowledging landscapes as merely picturesque/sublime à la William Gilpin and Edmund Burke, the entrance of environmental ethics extends the realization of nature’s beauty and human vulnerability during
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