

## Tourism research in China: themes and issues

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Tourism research in China: themes and issues**, by Songshan (Sam) Huang and Ganghua Chen, Bristol, Buffalo and Toronto, Channel View Publications, 2015, 168 pp., £89.95 / US\$149.95 / CAN\$159.95 / €109.95 (hardback), ISBN-13 978-1-84541-547-1

There has been growing scholarly interest in China's relationship with tourism as it becomes a pillar industry. While China is the world's biggest tourism source market, and has a healthy inbound market, *Tourism Research in China: Themes and Issues*, authored by Associate Professors Songshan (Sam) Huang (University of South Australia, Australia) and Ganghua Chen (Sun Yat-sen University, China) largely focusses on key themes and issues related to domestic tourism research. China's domestic tourism has outpaced its international tourism, with over 3.2 billion domestic trips taken in China during 2013. The authors seek to provide a critical in-depth review on a small number of themes, including Chinese scholars' epistemological views of tourism, rural tourism development, community participation in tourism, tourist market and behaviour, tourist attraction management, and tour guiding. Chapter 1 explores the landscape of tourism research in China by detailing the growth of universities providing tourism undergraduate degree programmes, and the role of various institutions, non-governmental organizations and agencies involved in tourism research. Chapter 2 explores the philosophical and epistemological views of tourism held by a small number of researchers in China, even though the work seems to complement the English academic literature in terms of the major theories in tourism.

Chapter 3 explores rural tourism research in China with the authors examining industry supply side research issues, demand-side, market issues, and socio-economic issues. The authors note the lack of research on inter-sector industry clustering, cooperation, and networking as well as marketing issues, destination branding, regional marketing cooperation, social equity, inclusion, and rural tourist market segmentation. Chapter 4 explores community participation and involvement in tourism using summaries of published case studies, to illustrate limited and full community. Chapter 5 explores tourist market and behaviour studies, using a Chinese Foci. The authors conclude that the Chinese tourism research community has paid more attention to supply issues than to the demand-side issues. Chapter 6 explores tourist attraction management in China by examining governance models, admission ticketing, environment and ecological system management, and safety and risk management. Chapter 7 explores tour guiding and interpretation in China by examining and contrasting tour guiding in a general sense, and the more regulated and monitored sector in China. Finally, chapter 8 summarizes the previous chapters, while the appendix provides a useful list of major reference sources of tourism research in China.

This book's premise is that China tourism research is poorly understood, as "communication between tourism researchers in China and their counterparts in Western countries is still limited" (p. 10). By identifying what they believe is a significant knowledge gap; Huang and Chen seek to uncover tourism research previously hidden from western minds by drawing on material published between 2006 and 2013 from four Chinese language Chinese tourism journals. The journals are *Tourism Tribune*, *Tourism Science*, *Economic Geography*, and *Human Geography*. It is not clear why these four journals were chosen, over a broader mix of high-quality peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of China Tourism Research*. A greater emphasis on the four journals, their history, and exact standing in China and in the Chinese speaking world would have been beneficial. All four journals are published from within China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau), and publish primarily in the Chinese

language. A more analytical breakdown that detailed the contributions by particular authors and their affiliations, evidence of methodological procedures, and the empirical and conceptual nature of the articles published from these journals would have indicated the evident worth of these publications and promoted academic cooperation among international tourism academics. It would also indicate whether there is a communications gap. It would also have put a spotlight on renowned scholars such as Xie Yanjun, a professor from Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, who has contributed so much to the field.

I expect that those who write and publish on Chinese tourism in English, and who not included in this book will feel their research may not significantly differ from that undertaken by those who publish in the four chosen journals. Given there have been a number of studies that have analysed broader China tourism research themes in recent years (Tsang & Hsu, 2011); a comparison would have been beneficial. The authors indicate that by focusing on the works of Chinese scholars in China (writing in Chinese), we can “better understand the tourism research scenarios in China” (p.136). They believe that because “Chinese-origin researchers outside China” (p. 118) write in English publications, there is a gap, as the locally published research remains unknown. There wasn’t enough rationale for this premise as many researchers write in both languages, cite articles from these Chinese based journals in their English publications, as well as many Chinese academics publish in these journals from abroad. Indeed, given, Tsang and Hsu (2011) indicate Chinese researchers who publish in high-ranking international tourism journals use more sophisticated methodological procedures, and are not bound by institutional constraints; their understanding of Chinese Tourism might be greater.

While the book draws on articles published between 2006 and 2013, it doesn’t reflect a broad field of research or emerging research themes. The selection of the themes is determined by the research interests and expertise of the two authors and their continuing observations on the industry’s development in is understandable. However, I hope inbound and outbound tourism and the impact of social media, climate change, and the green economy will surface in subsequent volumes. The elimination of the superfluous “international perspectives”, present in many of the chapters may be worth considering. Despite my minor criticisms, the book does make a healthy and timely contribution. Given the background and expertise of the two authors, the contents will be of interest to students researching domestic Chinese Tourism, and those interested in Chinese tourism more generally.

## References

Tsang, N. K. F., & Hsu, C. H. C. (2011). Thirty years of research on tourism and hospitality management in China: A review and analysis of journal publications. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30, 886–896.

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