

Chinese Outbound Tourism

Xiang (Robert) Li
Apple Academic Press
Oakville

2016

Review DOI

10.1108/IJCTHR-02-2016-0021

Keywords *China, Outbound*

The noted actor Tom Hanks, playing the role of the character Forrest Gump in the film of the same name, provided a number of memorable quotations. Of special relevance to this book review is his well-known analogy of life as a box of chocolates because “You never know what you’re gonna get”. Edited books with a diverse mix of authors with different styles, experience and nationality produce this kind of problem for editors and readers; an assortment of pieces which may delight or disappoint the consumer. As editor, Xiang (Robert) Li does a good job of packaging this collection. There is a tight structure to this book which, as the title suggests, concentrates on the contemporary character and movements of Chinese outbound tourists. The arrangement of the 23 chapters consists of a four-part sorting of the contributions into the following areas: introductory overviews, regional observations, cases and finally reflections and forecasting. There is more material in the middle two sections and less in the “bookends” to the book. At the core, it is a volume about markets, marketing and destination growth.

As suggested by the box of chocolates analogy, it is difficult in books of this sort to control the quality of the offerings, and there are some sections which may not be to everyone’s taste. The material on

regional observations repeatedly observes that Chinese tourists are a dominant force in contemporary tourism. The reports have a formulaic style and perhaps the editorial hand might have been too heavy in this section. It is of course hard to see how the authors of these regional reports would not make repeated points about the expansion of Chinese outbound travel, but the repetition of this implicit “growth is good” theme makes at least this reviewer yearn for more searching and less descriptive appraisals. This criticism is not meant to suggest that the details provided and the documentation are not of a high quality. There is plenty of source and resource material here for the graduate student and interested scholar. It is inevitable of course that the applicability and continued currency of this kind of reporting will fade quickly and scholars should be advised to use these available 2013 figures as a base and refresh the data from the nominated sources as the second decade of the twenty-first century unfolds.

The case study section is more appealing. Here there are specifics and points of focused interest for the more demanding reader. There are highlights of note. I personally enjoyed the chapters by Keating and Deery on regional distribution of tourists in Australia, on student tourists by King and Gardner, on stories and journeys by Yang, Wang and King and, not too immodestly I trust, re-reading our joint chapter (Pearce and Wu) on Chinese tourists in Florence, Italy. In making these positive observations about the cases it might be immediately noted that these favourite chapters feature

authors with Western surnames. The bias was not intentional but possibly important. Most of the authors in this volume do in fact have Chinese names and are located across the tourism globe. There is an implication in my selection that the chapters by those with Chinese names are not as good. That is not my point. Rather it is simply that many of the Chinese-authored chapters are decidedly more local in coverage and conceptualisation, and hence the cases are of less global applicability.

Editors of books of this type typically provide introductory and summative observations. The “bookends” to this volume are very much a part of the strength of the work. In the introductory section, Wolfgang Arlt confirms his status as one of the best informed authors about Chinese outbound tourism, while the account of Chinese tourism evolution by Guangrui Zhang is an obligatory reading for those who seek to understand the dynamics of the change in China and its overseas travel. The summative chapter on the critical theory approaches to the growing Chinese phenomenon by Harrill, Robert Li as editor and Xiao is an unusually powerful effort to add the theoretical grunt and flavour to the cases and the regional observations. The quality of these summative remarks and the attempt to undertake a broader sociological view of change in this final section are impressive. There is a sound treatment of critical theory and sociological accounts of change and some solid attempts to apply these considerations to the Chinese outbound topic. It is perhaps a pity that some of the previous chapters were not informed and enriched by these observations and perspectives.

While the volume addresses contemporary and impending

Chinese outbound tourism with thoroughness, there is only some recognition of similar and emerging outbound tourism growth from India, and in time Brazil and Indonesia. The key implication of this broader view is that Chinese tourists, who are currently so much in the spotlight of marketing attention, will have to interact with many other (Asian) middle-class communities in the global hotspots of world travel. More specifically, subtle questions around the issues of how Chinese tourists will deal with the co-presence of many South and South East Asian visitors in popular hosting destinations are worth asking but are not attempted in this volume. Tourism readers and researchers often look for the dark side of massive tourism growth, and there are global concerns about sustainability which might have been considered more fully in this volume. Additionally, much writing on Western tourists now has an interest in the fulfilment and well-being of tourists but this theme is not well developed in the current work. Despite the avowed 2.0 designation of the book, it appears that the interest on social media and contemporary concerns is directed more towards the technologies of access and communication rather than the spiritual journeys of the new tourists.

Graduate students and senior researchers with an interest in Chinese tourists will welcome this volume enthusiastically. The detail in many chapters will be mulled over and cited, and its opening and closing remarks will feature in the introductions to many future papers. It is hoped that similar companion volumes will address some of the themes touched on a little lightly in this valuable new reference work.

Philip L. Pearce

School of Business, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia