

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Domestic Tourism in Asia: Diversity and Divergence*

Shalini Singh, editor (London: Earthscan, 2009; 335 pp., UK £60.00 hardcover; ISBN-978-1-84407-660-4)

This is a useful and timely book. It has 16 chapters, and the destinations covered include Vietnam, Japan, India, Mongolia, the Tibetan border of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, and Singapore.

In her Introduction, Singh discusses the nature of “domestic tourism”—what it is, how “Asian” it can be, and how related to mass tourism (all questions which remain unanswered in this volume)—compares sacred and traditional travel with modern tourism, and notes the search of Asian travelers for nostalgia and novelty, along with such themes as escape versus change, and control versus freedom. She then presents three “distinctive subcategories” in the region’s domestic tourism: the *endemic* (culturally grounded), the *embedded* (in international tourism structures), and *bricolage* (mixed patterns), which she says vary according to the domestic and regional context. Despite an excess of generalizations (pp. 19–20, 22), the scene is well set for the chapters following, although her analytical categories are not taken up by her contributors.

Restricted coverage of Vietnamese tourism is found in Chapter 2, which is Alneng’s overly theoretical Marxist-orientated case study of “proto-tourism.” Focusing on Vietnamese pilgrims to Truc Lam monastery near Da Lat, a former colonial hill station, he contrasts Vietnamese perceptions of the place as a tourist center to Western views of it as a site for pilgrimage, and reflects on the tensions between commercialism and the sacred, largely as reflected on by a key informant,

a Buddhist bonze. In another case study (Chapter 3), Thompson analyses the success of Asuke Yashiki, Japan, a cultural heritage centre where day visitors from urban centers find a mid-19th century homestead reproduced in “a rural inland township” (p. 53) and partake of rural products reminiscent of “traditional” Japanese rural society. A “bottom-up” development, with public and private stakeholders, it combines business success with a traditional (and yet very modern) focus on sustainable rural living.

In Chapter 4, Singh introduces domestic tourism in India. Essentially seasonal, social, and family orientated, and low value and mass in character, it is related to traditional Indian pilgrimage, and the “sacredness” of pilgrim destinations is frequently linked to perceptions of their scenic and environmental value. At the same time, destinations are reportedly undermined by uncontrolled growth in visitor numbers, and pilgrim behavior is becoming increasing “secularized” (p. 96), with a corresponding decline in spirituality (p. 97) in favor of “ritualization” (p. 97), by which Singh seems to mean a rise in form over substance.

Country-wide domestic tourism, this time in communist Mongolia (from 1921 to 1990), is also discussed in Dorsjuren’s Chapter 5. Post-1990, Mongolia opened up to international tourism. The annual *Naadam* festival continues, with horse racing, wrestling and archery, as do (increasingly privatized) holiday camps and sanatoria (for health tourism). Since 1990, too, pilgrimage and other visits to religious centers have become established,

allegedly for “superstitious Mongolians” (p. 115), while nomadic culture, focusing on traditional Nomadic *ger* housing, has been made available for international and domestic visitors (with positive and negative impacts).

Vasantkumar’s somewhat indulgent description of Han tourists in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, north-west China (Chapter 6) illustrates how misleading the term “domestic tourism” can be. Urban Han Chinese visiting Tibetan areas in search of “foreignness” are themselves perceived by ethnic Tibetans to be distinctly “other” and are less welcome than international tourists (pp. 145–146).

Tourism’s contribution to and reflection of social divisions also figures in Chapters 8 and 9. In the former, Palmer discusses, inter alia, how forms of tourism developed in the Soviet period continue to dominate while, by contrast, the ethnic Kyrgyz population engages in jaloo tourism (migration to summer pastures), reproducing in small measure a previous and once-banned culture now increasingly marketed to domestic and international visitors. Similarly, in Chapter 9, Wall and Chang argue, by reference to several (largely unrelated) social surveys, that indigenous communities in Taiwan benefit from domestic (Han Chinese) tourism, even though their visitors may be more interested in novelty than “authenticity,” and are at least as attracted to the scenic environment as the cultural setting.

Elsewhere, domestic tourism reportedly fulfils a highly integrative function. In Cambodia (Sofield, Chapter 7), a society suffering from collective posttraumatic stress consequent to the horrors of the Pol Pot regime, tourism to the Angkor complex enables ordinary Cambodians, who repress memories of the recent Pol Pot years, “to reaffirm their identity and heritage and to idolize the glories of the [more distant] past” (p. 161). Less dramatically, perhaps (Wah and Hing, Chapter 10), residents of bustling Hong Kong have long valued the therapeutic effects of hill-walking, or *haang saan* (p. 223). Participants in this recreational activity have substantially increased since the 2003 SARS outbreak, and the authors contrast the non-formal emergence of numerous hiking clubs with the parallel development of government-subsidized

artificial or “contrived” ecotourist centers, such as the Hong Kong Wetland Park.

Domestic tourism in Macao, another Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, is described by Vong and Lam (Chapter 15). Away from heavy urbanization, in Taipa Island links can be made with the aboriginal past, and on Coloane Island locals mingle with international visitors at the beaches, trekking, and in sampling Macanese food (a mixture of influences from Macao and Portugal cuisine). They can also cross the border to Gong Bei, in China, celebrate numerous national festivals, or sample the delights of Macao’s casinos, which rival those of Las Vegas.

In Chapter 11, Rodolfo describes how, since the 1980s, successive governments in the Philippines have encouraged domestic tourism, most recently to compensate for declining international arrivals. Approximately 11 times the number of international visitors, apparently mainly VFR, though this is contradicted by some figures (pp. 236, 245), domestic tourism in the Philippines is often mass tourism, constituting big business for such holiday resorts as Puerto Galera, and (as expected) bringing a range of positive and negative economic and socioenvironmental impacts.

By contrast (Ihalanayake, Chapter 12), domestic tourism in Sri Lanka has been largely considered confined to pilgrimage and neglected by policy makers. More recently, with the decline in international tourism and the emergence of a professional class, it has received justifiable attention, as domestic tourists are an estimated eight times the number of international tourists. Importantly, in a class analysis rare in this collection, Ihalanayake notes differences between the formal and informal sectors, with the latter patronized mainly by the professional class, traveling by private car and staying at up-market establishments, and the latter by the poor and working class, using public transport and very basic facilities.

Domestic tourism in Singapore and Malaysia is discussed in Chapters 13 and 14. In the former, Yue notes the increased focus on domestic tourism in Singapore that followed the SARS period, and discusses the impact of the Bollywood film *Krrish*, which was subsidized, filmed, and set in Singapore in 2006. Inbound tourism from India increased, as did local pride in the city-state, albeit

at the cost of stereotyping its inhabitants. In Chapter 14, Henderson compares domestic tourism in Singapore with that of Malaysia, suggesting that it is more consistently promoted in Malaysia, which has more destination options, and a relatively poor population that is more inclined to engage in local travel.

In his Epilogue—a book review in itself—Walton reflects on a lack of coverage of the Middle East, Indonesia, Turkey, and South Korea, a relative lack of focus on China and Japan, as well as an absence of historical context, neglect of internal conflicts, and little on beach resorts, and sports and sex tourism.

Such criticisms are justified, though coverage of all these topics would be a massive undertaking. In addition, the use of case studies, while often revealing, can do little justice to the wider context. The sheer variety of Vietnamese tourism, for instance (and by extension all of South-east Asia), is hardly represented by Alneng's discussion of "proto-tourism." Stricter editing generally would have helped, and there is something to be said for separating country-centered analyses from more focused case studies. However, it must have been a Herculean task in finding contributors for such

a wide region, and the patchy nature of the contributions, in a collection of this kind, was perhaps inevitable.

The book is indispensable to anyone interested in tourism in less developed countries, and raises numerous issues. Clearly, "domestic" tourism can be as problematic as international tourism, and how far "domestic tourism" as a category is distinguishable from regional or international tourism remains unclear, as does the existence of an "Asian" variant. Domestic mass tourism in the Philippines (and Europe, North America and East Asia) is still mass tourism and, in several destinations described in this volume, local visitors of different ethnic groups are considered as "foreign" as, and sometimes less desirable than, international visitors. The moral, perhaps, is for those of us looking at tourism anywhere to consider both "domestic" and international tourism as parts of the same process—which, of course, they are.

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