
Book Review:

Tourism and Local Economic Development in China: Case Studies of Guilin, Suzhou, and Beidaihe

by Gang Xu¹

REVIEW BY TSERING YANGKI

To many, tourism evokes thoughts of visits to culturally stimulating new places or the adrenaline rush of an adventure. These simple pleasures aside, tourism is a practice with significant socio-economic and political repercussions. Gang Xu addresses these issues on a local level in his book *Tourism and Local*

To many, tourism evokes thoughts of visits to culturally stimulating new places or the adrenaline rush of an adventure.

Economic Development in China: Case Studies of Guilin, Suzhou, and Beidaihe. The book's central questions range from tourism's industrial and geographical structures to its effects—economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental—on particular destinations within his native country.

Born out of a research project on “The Impact of Tourism on Socio-Economic Change and Regional Development in the People's Republic of China,”² the book's foundation of data and information derives from eleven months of fieldwork, including data collection and interviews with tourists, employees at the National Tourism Bureau, and research institutions.

The primary conclusion of this exploration was that domestic tourism—but not necessarily foreign tourism—has significant revenue-generation and redistributive effects on China's local economies. The author does make a disclaimer about the scant information on domestic tourism, which seems contrary to his central discussion. One cannot help but want a more broad and solid grounding in relevant data.

A focus on domestic tourism in China has been gaining ground in the last few decades, rooted in the government's 1984-85 tourism policy and a subsequent development strategy that emphasized tourism as one of the main engines of revenue generation. Gang Xu points out that the trend of tourism in China has shifted to focus on compatriots, over-

For scholars interested in gaining technical knowledge of tourism and local economic development, his book offers valuable primary information on the coastal regions.

seas Chinese, and domestic tourism over drawing international tourists. As a result, domestic tourism in China has increased exponentially through the

A native of Tibet and a candidate for the Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy at The Fletcher School, Tsering Yangki focuses academically and professionally on the interplay between development strategies, financial enterprises, and political systems.

years with economic and political reform, and now Chinese are embarking on pilgrimages in increasing numbers and enjoying travel not just as a symbol of power and position, as during the pre-reform years, but also for the sheer joy of it.

Gang Xu treats the three cities in his study as locally distinct. He articulates the problems and challenges of tourism development in each and attempts to highlight specific issues that need to be addressed in each area. For development strategists, Gang Xu provides a very particular version of tourism and local development in China. Arguing for the need to redefine the goals and the role of tourism development, he calls for increased decentralization; a balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives; and more active local participation.

For scholars interested in gaining technical knowledge of tourism and local economic development, his book offers valuable primary information on the coastal regions. However, the policies, physical infrastructure, human capital, and socio-cultural-political issues present in Guilin, Suzhou, and Beidaihe are not necessarily representative of the entire country. Gang Xu chose these three areas, as they are major tourist destinations with different attractions and economic backgrounds. They do not necessarily face the same economic challenges of local development as elsewhere in China. Gang Xu does not attempt to deal with vexing problems of poverty, discrimination, the appropriation of local tourism enterprises by urban Chinese, and the irregularity of development policies in different regions. While his book is a useful study of the local-level impacts of tourism on three of China's provinces, it does not capture the country's diversity as a tourist destination or subject of study. Nevertheless, as a focused monograph, *Tourism and Local Economic Development in China: Case studies of Guilin, Suzhou, and Beidaihe* is detailed and useful. ■

NOTES

1 Published by Curzon, Surrey, UK in 1999. 244 pages.

2 Led by Professor E. Gormsen and supported by the Volkswagen Foundation.