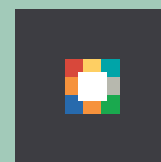


News from Northeast Asia

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Tourism in Korea, China, and Japan

Kyuhoon Cho

FOR MANY, travel is a measure of the quality of life. It is an activity people may engage in to make up for something lacking in everyday life, to find balance with a daily routine revolving around work. Travel acquires a variety of meanings in the lives of people today – from personal to socio-cultural. In addition to being an escape from the ordinary and a respite from their busy schedules, travelling allows them to experience diverse cultures, meet local people, discover new aspects of themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, and explore alternative lifestyles found in different cultural environments. In this way, the actions, impressions, and expectations of tourists reflect their identities, self-perceptions, and social aspirations.

The three essays below describe the signifying practices of East Asian tourists, analyze the diverse objectives and social effects of trips taken by foreign travelers in China, and investigate other related issues. Myungkoo Kang and Eun-Young Nam categorize the meanings attached by Chinese visitors to their travels in Korea into three types of 'gazes': patriotic-developmental, consumerist-cosmopolitan, and analytical-introspective. Ryosuke Okamoto offers a new perspective on 'contents tourism' using the case of the 'Tomb of Christ' (southern Aomori Prefecture, Japan) as a representative example of a tourist site that is obviously unauthentic. Linking tourism with migration, Yucheng Liang examines the differences between tourists from developing and developed countries who visit Guangzhou, China, by looking at their goals and local social networks.

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Chinese tourists. Image reproduced under a creative commons license courtesy of Morten Knutsen on Flickr.

Geographical imaginaries and travel experiences of Chinese youke in Seoul

Myungkoo Kang and Eun-Young Nam

OVERSEAS TRAVEL BY CHINESE TOURISTS, referred to as youke (游客) in Chinese, was liberalized in March 1997. Currently estimated at about 120 million people a year, China's outbound tourism ranks first in the world both in the total number of tourists and the volume of consumption. Going abroad became even easier for the Chinese after their country joined the World Tourism Organization in 2001, and the trend has accelerated into a tourism boom. According to a survey conducted by the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF 2014), when traveling abroad, Chinese tourists are mostly attracted by beautiful scenery (73.6%), unique cultures (68.6%), ancient history (58.1%), delicious food (48.5%), monumental buildings (33.3%), reasonable prices (33.3%), cheap products (29.1%), museums (22.1%), and friendly people (17.1%).

This essay examines the expectations, or, in John Urry's terms, the "tourist gaze", and meanings given to their trips by Chinese tourists visiting Korea, by analyzing results of a survey carried out by Seoul National University Asia Center in 2015 and Chinese travel reviews found online. The activity that the Chinese engaged in most often during their trips

to Korea was shopping (87.1%). This was followed by taking a city tour (35.5%), visiting a royal palace or other historical sites (32%), walking around downtown (29.4%), admiring the natural scenery (27.1%), and enjoying adult and other forms of entertainment (17.4%). The survey demonstrated that their travel purposes ranged from "having fun, resting, and recharging their energy" (37%) and "observing alternative lifestyles in diverse cultures and finding a new self" (30.2%) to "looking for a new meaning in life through encounters with unfamiliar sceneries and cultures" (21.7%) and "escaping the boredom of everyday life" (11.1%). Therefore, the majority of Chinese tourists visiting Korea consider their trips more than a simple escape from their daily routines or a way to relax but as an experience helping them to obtain new meaning in life.

To analyze the signifying practices of Chinese tourists, we divide the 'tourist gaze' into three categories: patriotic-developmental, consumerist-cosmopolitan, and analytical-introspective. It is worth noting that each individual tourist does not view Korea from only one perspective but several types of perspectives combine in layers that together form the tourist's image of the country.

The particular gaze is strongly linked to the tourists' identities. Those who go overseas with an emphasis on their identity as Chinese citizens manifest strong patriotic feelings and developmental attitudes. They think of Korea as a 'model of development' China has to learn from, compare the sizes of cities, history, cultural levels, etc., and look at Korea and its cities from the standpoint of the Chinese. The pride of being Chinese, China-centrism, envy, and an inferiority complex intersect in this gaze, which we call 'patriotic-developmental'.

Secondly, Chinese tourists are highly interested in shopping, consumption, and lifestyle. A penchant for shopping is especially prominent among female Chinese tourists in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Their focus is on how to express themselves as individuals, and for this reason, they like to observe the lifestyles of Koreans and Seoulites. In this 'consumerist-cosmopolitan gaze', shopping is the main purpose and biggest motivation for traveling; it is the most valuable activity enhancing the joy of a trip. The influence of (the Korean Wave), or fascination with Korea as a brand, constitutes an important factor producing a geographical imaginary and attracting tourists to the country. Those possessing this gaze feel like they are entering the global consumer culture and enhancing their fashion sense and lifestyle through shopping.

There is also the perspective from which tourists critically look into the hidden side of a tourist site and try to explain or interpret the site's features through their own logic. This type of gaze, which we named 'analytical-introspective', leads tourists to focus on experiencing local culture, making special, lifetime memories through travel experiences with their partners, and reflecting upon themselves. Compared to the previous two types, this gaze is composed of more subtle, introspective viewpoints. Overall, this study demonstrates the importance of examining the signifying practices by tourists themselves rather than the stereotypes unilaterally attached to Chinese tourists by the host society.

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