

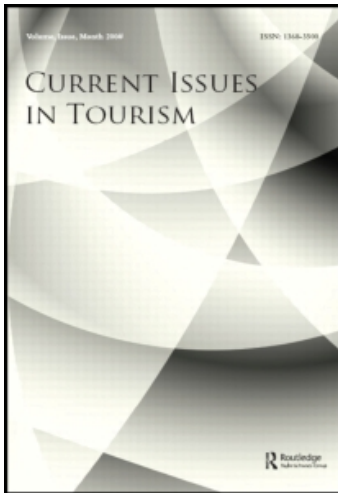
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Asian tourism and the retreat of anglo-western centrism in tourism theory

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Asian tourism and the retreat of anglo-western centrism in tourism theory

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In both its focus and conception, much of the research on tourism remains Anglo-Western centric. The ongoing growth of Non-Western forms of travel, most notably in Asia, renders this situation unsustainable. Our understandings of 'the tourist', 'the modern tourism industry' and the conceptual paraphernalia, which surrounds these two, are all firmly rooted in the empirical histories of Western Europe and North America. English language scholarship on tourism rarely rips up these 'Western' roots to interpret 'Non-Western' practices and industries. This paper focuses on the ongoing rise of Asian tourism to argue that in its current form the field of tourism studies is institutionally and intellectually ill equipped to understand and interpret the new era we are now entering. Accordingly, it is suggested that the core-periphery dynamics which characterises the field today should give way to cultural and political pluralism. The rapid growth in Asian tourism provides ample evidence for this position. This paper concludes by considering the future development of tourism studies in Asia. It is argued that the cultivation of critical scholarship within the region itself will not only help overcome the field's Anglo-Western centrism, but also help us better comprehend the profound societal changes now occurring through Asian mobility.

Keywords: research; academic disciplines; comparative analysis; Asia; critical theory; Non-Western

Introduction

As we move into the new millennium, we are constantly told that this will be the 'Asian Century'. By 2050, India and China will be the powerhouses of the global economy. If this is the case, then it can be safely assumed that modernisation, development and vast increases in wealth for hundreds of millions of people will lead to unprecedented levels of travel. Urry's (2007) suggestion that contemporary globalisation demands us to re-conceive societies in terms of 'mobilities' holds extremely important consequences for understanding and making sense of the rapid changes now occurring in Asia. The near overnight growth of budget airlines across the region and the production of a US\$2,500 car by Tata that will bring the freedom of movement to hundreds of thousands of families are just two indicators of a mobile future. Is the world of academia, and in particular the field of tourism studies, institutionally and intellectually equipped to address the profound social

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changes that Asian tourism will inevitably bring? I believe it is not. In this paper I want to spell out why not and offer some initiatives that might help us better address the myriad challenges and possibilities Asian tourism poses.

Anglo-Western centrism and beyond

From around 2000 onwards, there have been increasingly loud calls for a fundamental rethink about the paradigms and norms which shape scholarship on tourism. As more and more scholars have aired their feelings of discontent publicly, it appears we have entered a period of sustained reflexivity; one that calls for a 'new era', and a new generation of researchers capable of stepping out of the analytical and disciplinary straightjackets that have formed over the last three to four decades. Aitchison (2001), for example, pointed towards the need for greater gender equality. Coles, Hall and Duval (2006) suggested that the field would benefit greatly from a post-disciplinary outlook. To understand the complexities of today's tourism, they argue researchers 'would benefit greatly from a post-disciplinary outlook, i.e. a direction "beyond disciplines" which is more problem-focused, based on more flexible modes of knowledge production, plurality, synthesis and synergy' (p. 293). Back in 2000 the journal *Tourist Studies* was established with the specific aim of encouraging more critical, social science-based approaches to tourism. More recently, Franklin (2007, p. 132), one of the co-founders of the journal, went as far as saying the development of new theories is not the solution, but a whole new thinking about the ontology of the field is required: a new way of describing what tourism is/does. For Tribe (2006, 2007), however, first we have to understand a series of 'truths' by making explicit the ideological and hegemonic values which together constitute the belief systems of tourism research. He suggested researchers continue to work within a number of 'isms'; citing managerialism, Marxism and consumerism as examples (Tribe, 2007, p. 33). He also raised the spectre of ethnocentrism. But as I argue shortly, the full implications of this term have yet to be discussed by Tribe or others and that in its current usage, it only offers partial clarity. To really appreciate the ethnocentric problems facing tourism studies today, we have to dig down to its foundations and excavate another pervasive and persistent 'ism', that of Anglo-Western centrism.

It is a critical perspective that has been offered by others. In what must be the most provocative and stimulating diatribe on the subject, Alneng (2002, p. 138) referred to 'the ethnocentric cartography of tourism studies'. Reflecting on the pre-occupation of many post-MacCannell researchers for ever more elaborate tourist typologies, he states

Rather than having ethnographic accounts speak of cultural complexity, these typologies have done little more than splitting the Tourist into halves and ascribing these different motifs that do not ultimately contest MacCannell's unitary Tourist – they all dwell in a culturally barren landscape of modernist construed universality. While questions of class and age, and recently also gender, have sometimes been noticed, cultural variations of ethnicity and nationality have been left trivialized. (p. 123)

In a similar vein, Edensor (1998), Ghimire (2001), Gladstone (2006) and others have all questioned why there is an underlying and persistent assumption that tourists reside in western, industrialised societies of the global north. Correctly, Williams, Hall and Hew (2004) complained that such assumptions sustain major geographical imbalances in research. And yet, despite the publication of these various critiques, I believe their message largely remains un-noticed and that the field of tourism studies, understood in its broadest sense, has hardly begun to grasp the multitude of implications that arise

from it. The Western-centric modus operandi of research and teaching which endures today means the geographic, cultural and racial biases in the field remain a common blind-spot.

It is crucial that we recognise that nearly all the field's key concepts have been grounded in societal changes occurring in Western Europe or North America. Urry's (1990) idea of the *tourist gaze* puts its roots down in the emergence of clock time, trains, timetables and work and leisure dichotomies in an industrialising Europe. The *grand tour* is the story of the elite of Northern Europe travelling south to learn about the high art, architecture and history of the region's classical civilisations (Towner, 1996). The *flâneur* has its origins in Paris (Tester, 1994). The *package tour* is the contribution of Thomas Cook and Thomson holidays (Cobb, 2002; Withey, 1997). *Mass tourism* began with working-class seaside holidays in Victorian Britain, morphed into Butlin's resorts and eventually moved to the Mediterranean with the invention of the jet engine and charter flights (Inglis, 2000; Lofgren, 2002). And of course MacCannell's (1976) *tourist* was based on an American character. As tourism became increasingly global, these concepts formed the backbone of analyses for countries as diverse as Thailand, Mexico and Egypt. The development of tourist industries around the world has thus largely been interpreted through a tool-bag of theories conceived and re-conceived in the socio-cultural particularities of Euro-American societies. In essence, the normative use of expressions like package tour, mass tourism and the seaside now hides their cultural and historical roots.

Even in less positivist social science and humanities-based approaches, ideas like authenticity, development, heritage and 'the tourist gaze' emerged in ways that suggested they are universally applicable. Perhaps most crucially here, with the universalisms promised by structuralism and a Foucauldian poststructuralism underpinning MacCannell's (1976) alienated authentic seeking subject and Urry's (1990) tourist gaze, respectively, the idea of *the tourist* solidified as an all encompassing, analytical monolith. More recently, this notion of a singular *subject* has somewhat shifted to a more plural language of *subjectivities* via analytical frameworks oriented around ideas of performance (Edensor, 1998), embodiment (Sheller, 2003; Yalouri, 2001) or consumption as practice (Crouch, 1999). Nonetheless, these debates invariably continue to rely upon European and North American citizens as their empirical starting point. Indeed, as already noted, to date the vast majority of studies have looked at 'Western' forms of tourism and their impact on communities, places and environments. This does not however mean that 'Non-Western' forms of tourism have been ignored entirely. For example, contributions from Graburn (1995), Oakes (1998), Tan, Cheung and Yang (2001), Nyiri (2006) and Notar (2007) are among the various studies conducted on domestic and intra-regional tourism in Asia. But despite these works, scholarship continues to be dominated by certain analytical and conceptual ideas which have essentially been conceived in the historical, cultural and social changes occurring in Europe and North America. In the case of the social sciences and humanities, examples here might include modernity, post-modernity, performed identity or the cultural economies of leisure consumption. And in the context of management and business studies, countless studies have been driven by destination life cycle theories, consumer profiling models or 'case studies'. Hanging their theoretical import on the hooks of replication and predictability, such approaches have commonly provided the basis for misguided claims of universality.

Moreover, and as I have documented elsewhere, within a field that has prioritised ideas of a *global* tourism industry impacting on a *local* environment, less attention has been given to regional, cultural and geographic differences and parallels (Winter, 2007). Given that the paradigm of tourism has in large part been constructed around an analysis of west-to-east, north-to-south encounters, rooted in ideas of globalisation as a process of westernisation,

our tourist has been silently conceived as white (and male). Like most fields of scholarship, the global lingua franca is English. The key journals in the field, such as *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, *Tourism Geographies*, *Tourist Studies* and *Tourism Economics*, are run from institutes in Europe or the US. For Asia, the Hong Kong-based *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* and India-based *Tourism Recreation Research* represent notable exceptions here. But while a number of major universities across Asia increasingly turn their attention to tourism, we have yet to see a consolidation of scholarship that speaks back to, or transcends, today's dominant discourses which have largely been cultivated in academic departments located in post-industrial, 'Western' societies of the global north.

Of course, it would be misleading to deny that the wealthy, technologically advanced, 'modern' societies of Western Europe and North America have all developed highly sophisticated, large-scale tourism industries. It is therefore understandable that analytical frameworks emerged, which attempted to make sense of these historical patterns. And it is surely not surprising that as academics reflected on their holidays, their interest in *the* subject grew from being *its* subject. Perhaps the scale, scope and complexity of tourism and its practice have indeed been less 'developed' in regions outside Europe and North America, but I would also argue that there has been a widespread failure to look more closely and incorporate non-Western forms of leisure travel into mainstream discussions and theories about tourism. In the case of Asia, for example, it would be difficult to defend a position that denies a long history of tourist mobility both within and beyond the region. Just because 'package tours' were not the industry standard in India in the years after World War II, can we assume travelling for leisure was not widespread during this time? Or that the absence of railway travel in nineteenth century Laos meant the aesthetic appreciation of landscape failed to emerge in the country? Or that seventeenth century Japanese Buddhists travelling to Angkor did not rely upon local guides and forms of hospitality? Indeed, in raising such questions I would suggest that the history of 'modern tourism' has been written from a Eurocentric perspective. It is an account that centres Europe as the birth place of modern tourism, an industry that became increasingly global as citizens of Western, industrialised countries travelled further and further afield. And as I have already noted, it is an account that has used these citizens to construct 'the tourist' as a globally recognisable, supposedly universal subject.

At this point, it is worth pausing for clarification. I am suggesting this centrism takes on two forms. First, while it would be misleading to say that non-Western tourism has been totally overlooked and that a number of valuable studies have not been made, there is little doubting that the vast majority of research to date has cast its gaze on 'Western' tourists and their cultural, social and economic impacts. Crucially, this imbalance has both contributed to, and reflected a second form of Anglo-Western centrism: the accepted norm of uncritically applying certain analytical and theoretical approaches conceived, in particular, historical circumstances to all forms of tourism everywhere. English language scholarship on tourism has all too rarely torn up its 'Western' roots to interpret 'non-Western' tourist practices and industries.

In essence then, the critical voices of Alneng, Edensor, Williams et al. and the various studies conducted on domestic and regional tourism in regions outside Europe and North America have yet to disturb the ethnocentric foundations of the field, which emerge from the widely held assumption that tourists come from the West and that 'the modern tourism industry' is essentially Western in its origins. The essays collected together in the 2007 volume *The Critical Turn in Tourism Studies* are symptomatic of this ongoing problem. In what is a highly stimulating and thought provoking volume, a number of

well-known and up-coming authors explore an array of issues concerning current tourism theory, with many suggesting various intellectual and institutional reforms. In Chapter 1, Pritchard and Morgan (2007, p. 11), two of the book's editors, offered a persuasive account of why there needs to be an 'intellectual de-centring in the universe' of tourism scholarship. They begin by calling for changes in the academy, through a deconstruction of the 'hierarchies which exert power in and control over the tourism field' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 14; Williams et al., 2004). Citing previous studies that have looked at the locations of leading scholars, journals and PhD programs, they demonstrate why the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand are 'the key power bases of the academy' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 16). To analyze the centres of power within these countries, they rightfully gave particular attention to the patriarchal values embedded in the field and the gender imbalances which characterise appointments to university faculties and journal editorial boards. They suggested 'not only are our academy's gatekeepers typically male, first generation scholars, it also emerges that they are more likely than not to be grounded in Western Anglocentric epistemic research traditions (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 16). Accordingly, they revisit the critique expressed by a number of earlier observers concerning the predominance of positivist and post-positivist approaches, particularly in the context of management and business studies departments. Indeed, as we know the epistemic paradigms pursued in such environments invariably rest upon the foundations of scientific rationalism, which prioritises objectivity, empiricism, quantitative data and predictability. In considering what voices and approaches are marginalised, they once again highlighted the neglect of gender issues and the trivialisation of women's studies.

In order to de-centre this universe Pritchard and Morgan (2007) argued 'as researchers, we must begin to articulate and confront the ethnocentricity, which has shaped much of tourism research' (p. 21). This is deemed necessary because 'the conceptualisation and scholarship related to extant tourism literature has been created largely by white, Anglo-centric masculine voices. Other voices (particularly those of women, ethnic minorities and aboriginal peoples) have struggled to be heard' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 22). They continue: 'we must act to decentre the tourism academy and respond to the challenges and critiques being articulated by indigenous scholars so that we may begin to create knowledge centred on indigenous epistemologies and ontologies' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 22). These are clearly good and well meant intentions.

There remains, however, a fundamental problem in this account. Reference to ethnic minorities and aboriginal peoples reflects a strong geographical bias. Their claim that we need to bring to the fore the epistemologies and ontologies of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities rests on the idea that these are marginalised in societies of white majorities. To clarify this, they indicate 'future tourism research needs to comprehend, resist and transform the crises related to the effects of colonisation on indigenous peoples and the ongoing erosion of indigenous languages, knowledge and culture as a result of colonisation' (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 22). Clearly then in framing the concept of indigeneity in such terms, we are in the realm of *native peoples*, *first nations*, or *aborigines* who have suffered white Anglo-Saxon forms of colonisation. And so while we have seen their critique of tourism studies highlights the hegemony enjoyed by institutions and scholars in the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, their concern for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples essentially only speaks to, and about, these five countries. Indeed, in an account focusing primarily on the epistemic and institutional reforms required in these five countries, their proposed 'new approach' remains silent about the challenges and opportunities facing tourism studies in the rest of the world.

To be more inclusive and overcome these ‘Eurocentric tourism imaginaries’, we need to move far beyond a language of ethnic minorities and colonised indigenous peoples. It is a definition of inclusion that continues to ignore the majority of the world’s population. It gives no place for perspectives on tourism from scholars living in Thailand, Japan, Russia, Kenya or Dubai, to cite just a few examples. It is a discussion of margins and the marginalised that fails to question, and thus disrupt, the position of these five Western countries, and the English language, as the global centre of scholarship on tourism.

In Pritchard and Morgan’s desire to include the indigenous voice we also hear a concern for addressing exploitation and injustice. They argue

to decentre the tourism academy . . . academic decolonization is a necessity and a responsibility. It must be based on dialogues characterized by respect, reciprocity, equality, collectivity, and empathy between indigenous minorities, indigenous researchers, and their non-indigenous counterparts. (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 22)

Evidently, in sentiments where aboriginals and minorities remain victims we see the discomfort of the *white man’s burden*. Although driven by noble ideals, such expressions of anguish, even guilt, are nevertheless highly problematic. The merits and drawbacks of discourses flavoured by ideas of victimisation and exploitation have long been debated by feminist and post-colonial scholars. But as their fields evolved, it became apparent that such conversations were of limited value. In this context, given the historical and thematic links between colonialism and tourism, it is a discourse that implies the agents of exploitation remain the same, and that we merely need alternative voices and perspectives capable of countering the hegemonic narrative. Through this lens of social justice and ‘ongoing erosion’, the villains and victims of the touristic encounter remain in their same positions. It appears, the ‘native’ has yet to be liberated as the agent of tourism, and take on the role of the tourist.

Many of the themes outlined in this introductory chapter are pursued in greater detail in the book’s subsequent chapters. Read together the authors deliver a richly detailed and, at times, provocative analysis of the field. Once again however, the principle topics of concern are theoretical and disciplinary boundaries, the importance of critical paradigms, gender or the need for new methodological approaches. Beyond the broad recognition that the field is dominated by research emanating from the English speaking, neo-liberal institutions in North America, Australasia and the UK, there is little discussion concerning how this situation creates a range of geographic, intellectual and thematic biases. Even some of the book’s most insightful writing on the state of tourism theory today retains this assumption. Franklin’s chapter of the ‘ordering of tourism’, for example, whilst innovative in its analysis, firmly situates tourism in a history of nation building in Europe, as we can see from the following passage

I have tried to locate the specific origins and contingencies of modern tourism in nation formation processes, which at least provide the possibility of exploring the detailed nature of agency in a socio-political problem and movement. I have also tried to identify using the early British travel writings of John Byng to show the startling absence of (or indeed indifference to) a popular travelling culture or tourism during the eighteenth century, prior to the main period of nation formation movements in the nineteenth century. John Byng and Thomas Cook after him were extremely influential and *unusual* at the same time. While the conditions for the emergence of modern tourism were contingent and generally given in the currents of nation formation, it still required people of imagination to dream the dream, to envisage something entirely new . . . For what they both did was create the *idea* of tourism where none had existed before . . . (Franklin, 2007, p. 140)

We see similar patterns elsewhere. The recent volume *Histories of Tourism* (Walton, 2005: back cover), for example, also offers Europe as the sole empirical base for developing a 'closer relationship between history and tourism studies'. To build this analytical relationship, the book focuses on stories like travel and empire and travel journalism in the nineteenth century Britain, the development of resorts in Spain, Nazi tourism, the English Lake District and Austrian travel literature. Although it undoubtedly fills in an important void in our knowledge, the volume tells us nothing about non-European developments in recreational travel.

It can thus be seen then that this privileging of Europe and the US in the annals of tourism means we still overlook parallel developments in other parts of the world. In response then, I believe we need to move on from treatise that retain hierarchies of the oppressed or minority and embrace an approach that sees pluralism as its starting point. By this I mean an approach that is at once geographically, politically and epistemologically plural. Only by doing so can we understand the inherent complexities of tourism, and the major shifts now occurring in this ever more globalising industry. Of course, these arguments are of pertinence for understanding tourism in Africa, Latin America or the Middle East (to use such historically laden terms). The advancement of a more pluralist discourse will depend on these regions becoming part of a multi-centred analysis. However, the rapid and predicted long-term growth of Asian tourism, both within and beyond the region, presents particular urgencies. Indeed the collection of essays presented in the forthcoming volume *Asia on Tour; exploring the rise of Asian Tourism* vividly illustrate why reflection needs to be given to the extant Western-centric orthodoxies in tourism research (Winter, Teo, & Chang, 2008; see also Cochrane, 2007). In focusing on Asia in this paper, I argue that the changes occurring today forces us to rethink our approaches, our ways of looking, our points of entry and our existing theoretical dialogues. I am not advocating a position of cultural determinism, nor am I suggesting the cultural and social complexities of the region be reduced to constructs of a homogenous Asia. Attempts to delineate the 'Asian tourist' as a conceptual category, for example, will be counter-productive. And I am certainly not suggesting research requires 'an Asian eye' or should head in the directions of an analytical 'nativism': a perspective which entails a widespread rejection of Western knowledge. But until we begin to seriously question the universalisms at the core of tourism studies, we will not know when we need to embark on radical overhauls, and where we need to merely adjust and fine-tune, swerve and nudge.

Contemplating an Asian future

Frameworks of cultural and political pluralism have become important ways of constructing a critique that exposes the privileging of certain positions. To think about addressing the dynamics between majority and minority voices though, we need to move far beyond the assumption that the *a priori* majority is the Anglo-Saxon white. A pluralist standpoint asks us to reflect upon broader interplays characterised by urban/rural, ethnic, religious, gendered and other distinctions. Of course such ontological positions often remain ideals and aspirations, with their advocates frustrated by power and resistant social, institutional structures. As Ateljevic, Pritchard and Morgan (2007) correctly pointed out, to overcome the status quo we need to pursue more critical approaches. Accordingly, in the final part of this article I offer some directions for developing a more critical dialogue, one that will hopefully help address the core, periphery, Anglo-Western imbalances in the field. A shift towards a more pluralist perspective is not merely an intellectual or political concern; the ongoing growth of non-Western forms of travel are the empirical impetus

for cultivating new approaches and perspectives. The following six points certainly do not pretend to be a panacea. Naturally, the problems of gender, knowledge force-fields and disciplinary outlooks raised by Aitchison, Tribe and Coles et al., respectively, are highly pertinent here. However, rather than rehearse their remarks, I wish to concentrate on some issues and challenges that are deemed most relevant to the arguments outlined above. Indeed I limit my discussion to the development of critical scholarship on Asia. And to move the conversation away from the bureaucratic and disciplinary issues facing European and North American researchers, particular attention is paid to the development of critical tourism scholarship within the Asian region itself.

Writing histories of Asian tourism

To better interpret current developments and future trends in Asian tourism, we need to understand where they have come from. It is also imperative we situate the historical growth of travel within and across sub-regions within their appropriate societal changes. This is not an easy task. The archives of knowledge vary immensely both within and between countries, and framing the rise of leisure travel in the wider social contexts of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernity is fraught with analytical problems. The historiography of Asian travel is also faced with the problem of making visible existing ideas of culture, peoples and places constructed from Orientalist and Eurocentric colonial/post-colonial perspectives. Nonetheless, the lack of historical accounts is a major problem that warrants the attention of numerous conferences, PhDs, books and detailed empirical studies.

Develop grounded theory and alternative discourses

This is perhaps the trickiest issue of all, and the one that requires the most careful attention. Clearly, a discussion of issues such as intellectual imperialism, the geo-politics of scholarship and post-colonial theory are far beyond the scope of this article. However, I wish to suggest that the uncritical transplantation of ideas, such as modernity and post-modernity, risk and performance into accounts of Asian tourism, is of very limited value. The arguments offered by Alatas in his recent book *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism* are instructive here. As Alatas (2006) highlighted this problem of ‘mimesis’ – that of uncritically adopting or imitating Western social science models – is a long one (p. 32). In response he laid out a series of ‘alternative discourses’, ones that are

informed by local/regional historical experiences and cultural practices in Asia in the same way that the Western social sciences are. Being alternative means a turn to philosophies, epistemologies, histories, and the arts other than those of the Western tradition. These are all to be considered as potential sources of social science theories and concepts, which would decrease academic dependence on the world social science powers. (p. 82)

Alatas carefully spelled out why such alternative discourses make a positive contribution to the field of knowledge. The production of non-Western epistemologies is not driven by a desire to reject Western approaches *in toto* (Alatas, 2006, p. 85). He highlighted collaborative approaches, for example, albeit with heavy words of caution, as a strategy for delivering richly detailed interpretations. Equally, he recognises the benefits of cultivating multiple centres of theory. Of course, the arguments offered by Alatas sit within far-reaching,

complex debates. Without extending this present discussion further into those debates, it is worth noting one further point that is particularly pertinent to the concerns expressed earlier regarding the enduring prevalence of positivism in tourism research. He suggests

the formation of a social science tradition which involves the raising and treatment of original problems and new research questions as well as the generation of new concepts. It involves the critique of positivist social science to the extent that models of society epistemologically founded in the physical sciences obstruct the interpretative understanding of local situations. (p. 89)

What we clearly see here is a call for new ways of looking, and a willingness to risk alternative, untried avenues of analysis. In foregrounding interpretative approaches, it is also a perspective that points towards the need for humanist, qualitative, value-driven research. Following Alatas, and Teo (2008), I would suggest it is a philosophical perspective towards research and knowledge production that needs to be at the heart of tourism scholarship across the region.

Create the institutional homes in Asia that support and promote critical perspectives

The rapid growth in leisure travel in Asia means the study of tourism is too important to leave to tourism departments alone. To date much of the teaching and research in India, Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia has been on hospitality and tourism management. While courses in these areas undoubtedly address important skills voids, it is crucial the field is not merely examined in vocational or technological institutions. The debates concerning the positioning of tourism research and its intellectual foundations noted above should be central concerns for planning teaching and research programs in Asia's universities. To understand and interpret the wider societal impacts of tourism, and how domestic and intra-regional travel is reshaping the cultural, social and physical landscapes of Asia, we need to embed tourism related scholarship in sociological, anthropological, development studies, heritage studies, environmental studies, and cultural geography environments. Only by working towards more rigorous intellectual foundations can we realistically address the merits of inter- versus post-disciplinary outlooks. Finally, by critical perspectives I mean approaches that engage with issues such as power, structure, inequality and human rights. If these are to emerge, institutions need to retain a healthy degree of political autonomy from state and other transnational groupings. With funding clearly being the key challenge here, lobbying government departments and other stakeholders, both domestic and foreign, about the merits of critical thinking will undoubtedly be an arduous, but necessary task.

Centring scholarship from Asia

Today social science scholarship on tourism is continuing to gain greater traction in Asia's most respected universities. Driven in large part by the ever growing pool of students in countries like China, there is also a strong pattern of growth in the number of collaborations and partnerships between institutes in Asia and with universities in the US, UK, Australia, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, etc. More and more early, career academics living and working in Asia are undertaking exciting research. Seen together these developments give strong reasons to be optimistic. A number of challenges remain however: the extant imbalances in journal editorial boards; academia's inbuilt biases concerning the location

of publications; the pressures imposed on early career researchers to publish in a selected number of rated journals; the widespread use of English at conferences; poor visibility and distribution of Asian publications outside the region and the hegemony of English language publishing.¹ There is also the danger that Asia will be seen as a form of 'area studies', with its own regionalised debates and theoretical concerns. In essence to ensure pluralism is the starting point of theory generation, and in particular critical theory generation, the core, periphery hierarchies which characterise the field today need to be overcome.

Address country imbalances

Like governments, companies and entrepreneurs around the world, academia is in the rush to China. It is crucial that efforts are made to understand the region's less dynamic and 'spectacular' countries. Over the longer term domestic and in-bound regional tourism will undoubtedly have a major impact on the societies of Burma, Sri Lanka, Aceh, Nepal and Laos. Given the current growth of studies on Japanese, Hong Kong, mainland Chinese and Singaporean tourism, there is a risk these countries will continue to be overlooked. At the conceptual level, it is also vital that the immense cultural, political and historical differences across the region are not dissolved by an analytical conflation, whereby China comes to speak for the whole of Asia. Particular efforts are therefore required to raise the visibility of institutions and scholarship in smaller countries. Initiatives here might include more collaborative partnerships and the cross translation of research and publications.

Get critical thinking on tourism into policy

The ongoing growth of tourism will be intimately tied to the transformation of cities, rising economic inequalities, prostitution, migration, nationalisms, environmental damage, heritage management, the consumption of un-renewable energies and so forth. Tourism as a force for cultural, economic and political change needs to be a recognised component of policy formulation. At present, the contradictions and complexities of tourism are rarely integrated into the planning strategies of governmental and non-governmental agencies. As more and more national economies turn to domestic and regional tourism for economic growth, it is crucial that tourism is not treated merely as a 'sector' of industry or commerce.

To sum up then, it is worth reiterating that the subject matter and issues at stake are far too complex for these six points to be anything like prescriptive or comprehensive. Instead, they are offered in the hope that they stimulate, provoke and unsettle discussions about the future directions of tourism research. I believe the long-term growth in Asian tourism necessitates a rethinking about how tourism is both researched and taught. The pursuit of critical, empirically grounded approaches is the only way to achieve that, and at the same time, make sense of the wider societal consequences emanating from this ongoing growth in Asia. The sustained analysis of this phenomenon is undoubtedly a journey we need to embark upon urgently. And just like tourists, researchers need roadmaps and guide-books to make sense of the unfamiliar territories now being entered.

Note

1. Indeed the dilemma of how to better integrate non-English scholarship, whether it emanates from Europe, Asia or Africa, into the English language academy is a problem faced by many fields of scholarship today.

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