

# Experiencing China : Travel stories by tourism experts

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The first thought that strikes the reader's mind, including of the reviewer, post reading the title; "Experiencing China: Travel Stories by Tourism Experts", is - Literature has lost many a gems to tourism academics.

The edited title is a collection of 16 pieces (travel experiences woven into storylines) by 15 renowned members of the academy. The book opens with an introduction by the editors, Haiyon Song and Kaye Chon. The opening lines of the book give a reason not to substitute travel by reading; "reading of the book is not a substitute to travel to China" expressed with a help of Chinese saying; 'Read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles'. The introduction explains the origin of the book and in brief the background of each story.

The opening story, Sino Signage: Two decades of Travel Impressions of China by Graham M. S. Dann and Elizabeth Dann presents experiences in 'time-series' format over a period of 20 years. The politeness of signages has been reflected well with live examples. The author remarks that with regard to signage; 'petitionary is accompanied by obligatory'. 'Unintended humour in signage induced by lack of idiomatic equivalence' and the classification of 'hortatory commands' has been well knitted (pages 36, 39 and 40). Reproductions of signages as photographs in the book (p 42) provide first hand taste to the reader. The authors end by advocating equality of treatment to members of host society irrespective of wherever they share space with tourists.

Nelson H H Graburn's, Experiencing Xinjiang : Anthropologists and Friends in Urumqi. The Muslim China and famous graves which of late have become major tourist attraction are mentioned and author compares the villages of this part of China to Egypt's Nile villages due to the presence of masjids. The cultural peep into a Kazaki wedding by the author has packed even minutest of details. The author puts it simple that most extraordinary moments were unplanned and serendipitous events.

China's contribution to the world map and Chris Ryan's contribution to the title has been immense, with three stories to his credit.

The first contribution of Chris Ryan, The Yellow Mountains- The Romance of Huangshan, makes a nostalgic beginning covering a period of 37 years. His affair with a young girl Lee over changing landscapes of mountain is picturesque. The author handles the issues of mass tourism on mountainous areas; and language here seems to be a cry of a saviour (p91). The story ends with the climax reaching extremes in the last line; end to start a second one; Swansea and Shanghai. The story of tracing ancestry with backdrops of China, juxtaposed images of 70-80 years earlier and the present times weave magic. A dash of romanticism across generations is noteworthy. The third story Chris contributed, titled Classic Red- A story of Generations. It traces the changes in China and major events that have occurred within one lifetime aptly summed up by the author as 'through grandparents and grandchildren time span'.

China's Green Sea- A Journey of Discovery Across Inner Mongolia by Stephen J Craig Smith opens up with China's easiest available souvenir---- porcelain; which for a long time has been the only window to the "Exotic Far East". The author artistically paints his love for steam engines, Inner Mongolia, mineral springs, and contrasts modern cities with reindeers moving freely in the front. The description of virgin Mongolia before the advent of the tourists is story's USP. The story ends with a wish that in Inner Mongolia, 'the old may not be subsumed by new'. The remaining Mongolia or reserve areas have been covered by Geoffrey Wall in a story titled, Serendipity. In the story author's meetings occur by chance and comfortable cultural differences are enjoyed over drinks between different cultural backgrounds of the new found serendipitous friends of the author.

William Gartner's description of China Through Green Eyes focuses upon hospitality of the region where toasts and alcoholic spirits flow freely to an extent where author, 'had to be poured into a taxi', on one of the occasions. The story differentiates 'tourist packaged China' and 'China seen in the capacity of teacher, professor and friend', author ,off course supporting the later.

Tenth story Chinese Cultural Crossovers: Sharing a Table in China, by Gianna Moscardo provides some food for thought. Author emphasizes that, 'food is a reflection of a society than eating out in China'. She packs three short stories into one. The first one of sharing host table with Chinese factory workers, second with conference attendees and third experiencing Americanized Australian food in China's mainland, where western names of outlets themselves attract locals. The author goes back to her 'interpretation' skills to an extent that she starts interpreting the menu card of Outback.

Phillip L. Pearce contributes the next story In Search of the Chinese People: Cross Cultural Vignettes. The background chosen here is western China. The author discusses his conversation with young Tibetan hotel worker and concludes that 'desire to see beyond the local horizon motivates many people'. The humour tickles the readers at times --- 'my cross cultural experiences were about to become gastronomic then cerebral', his description of after effects of local Chinese cures and the bargaining scenarios at the souvenir shops--- all are vignettes at their best. The researcher in author could not be put in hold for long and satisfies himself by providing suggestive topics for studying China.

Juanita Ching Liu's contribution, Travelling to China a Guanxi is purely Chinese in all its respect. Dealing with 'ethnicity' and 'existential home', the story brings out benefits and constraints of 'Guanxi' (relationships).

Stephen L J Smith's story Shanghai Postcards brings out the contrast between Canada and China especially when it comes to students' behaviour. The story is all about 'mental pulling out of emotional postcards', as author best describes it. The food has been associated with China everywhere but in this particular story it has been done in most detailed fashion, to an extent it may sound weird to an alien (in Chinese terms).

Bliss of the Mountains: The Huangshan Experience comes from an author who is known as the Man of the Mountains Professor Tej Vir Singh. His love for the mountains is explicitly public. The opening paragraphs of the write up mentions the Mighty Himalayas, Alps, Mount Blanc, Mogelsberg, Young Frau, to name a few. The out migration of mountain community is a universal phenomenon and a concern which is emphasized in the story. The

Huangshan Mountain reminds the author of his first love; The Himalayas to an extent, nostalgia engulfs. The altitude, exact distances, flora, fauna described at times make the reader forget the vagaries of distance and provides a feeling of being actually at the site itself with the author. The assimilation of mountain community of Anhui with the physical environment, and these moments filling the vacant moods of the author paints pictures in the mind of the reader. Questions of sustainability and crossing over the carrying capacity close the story albeit in a poetic composure.

Jigang Bao finds a novel way to acknowledge and pay gratitude to his respondents at Shangri La through the story, The People in Tourism in Shangri La. Author introduces some base problems that obstruct the tourism development in Shangri La.

China Memories: the West Lake and Chocolate Cake by Richard Butler contrasts Hong Kong and Hongzhou. The Chinese Christmas and interaction with students has packed all details of young China in an interior region. All that the author was left with at the end of his visit was; 'friendliness, curiosity, kindness and courtesy.'

Destination China--- What a Revelation, What a Surprise! By Boris Vukonic depicts the China's knowledge of a Croatian through the literature available from Marco Polo and Andrija Stampar - 'A distant mystical land'. The tussle over 'neck tie' as Chinese or Croatian souvenir makes an interesting read.

The book is packed in a novel format and on a recycled paper which attracts the attention instantly. The water sketches on the cover and inside are soothing to eyes. The photographs accompanying the text have been tastefully done. Food, people and places are a common theme which is expected of any title on tourism. The mystical aspect of China, populated streets and places, bicycle and modernization are also regular themes appearing repeatedly continuously all over the book. The authors have followed their specializations and have tried to commit to their niches, but doing complete justice to their write ups.

The book is a light read and is useful to anyone who wants some insight in this mystical land. To the reviewer it provides ample doses of mao tai (local wine) to be a 'guizi' or 'guelo' (ghost/foreigner) in the mystical land.