

Oakes, Tim and Donald S. Sutton
2010 *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State*. Plymouth:
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Review of *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State*

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How should we understand the simile, 'Chairman Mao is the God of Wealth', that is widely accepted by Chinese people nowadays? The book *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State* is a well-written guidebook consisting of nine beautiful case studies that demonstrate the extremely dynamic and complicated process leading to the comparison. First, the authors of the book challenge the assumption that tourism and pilgrimage should be viewed as two unrelated categories and provocatively suggest that there is a continuum between the pilgrim and the tourist (p. 11). Secondly, they aim to understand the role of the Chinese state in brokering both tourism development and religious revival in China. Thirdly, they question the nature of this 'revival' itself (pp. 3-4). Unlike James Scott's (2009) aim of establishing an anarchist history of people inhabiting parts of Southwest China, the authors do not present arguments about 'society without the state' because the Chinese state, and the People's Republic of China in particular, has proved itself to be an inescapable power expanding its political influence on different levels of people's lives. Nonetheless they also argue convincingly that the Chinese state is not, in fact, all-powerful.

Faiths on Display has an introduction by Tim Oakes and Donald Sutton, nine chapters in the form of case studies, and an afterword by Rubie Watson. The work represents a continual effort to research the mobility of the Chinese people and the modification of localities against a backdrop of the interaction between globalization and glocalization, a trail blazed beautifully by the earlier book, *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of the Space* (Oakes and Schein, 2006). Unlike *Translocal China*, however, which is concerned more about how different sorts of network have become intertwined and come into play in the formations of diverse identities, *Faiths on Display* puts its emphasis on the 'contents' (i.e. 'religious revival') that flow within different sorts of network in the face of the flourishing tourism industry in post-Mao China. Even without any specific (re-)definition, it is understandable why the authors use 'faith' instead of 'religion', since they can then explore different forms of practices that are 'religious', rather than 'religions' themselves. The apparent religious practices include the reshaping of religious landscape (Mount Tai, Jinggangshan, Wuzhen), recreations of beliefs and rituals (Dixi, Beijing Ethnic Park, Naxi religion) and

reinventions of local cultures (northern Sichuan, Xishuangbanna, Fujian). The authors successfully elaborate on how and why many landscapes, rituals, cultures and local societies have been drawn to make modifications and transformations as the Chinese state boosts its economy by promoting tourism. Most strikingly, the authors reveal a much more dynamic and complicated picture by demonstrating how the qualities of tourists fail to meet the states' expectations, how the 'revival' acquires a life and meaning of its own beyond the reach of the state's power, and how 'red tourism' has failed to serve as a propaganda tool for the Chinese state.

And yet, some questions remain to be answered in future studies. First, I partially agree that there exists a 'pilgrim-tourist continuum' as argued by the authors, since it implies a gradation in how much the tourist's or pilgrim's behavior is like that of a tourist or pilgrim, and how much a particular attraction is sacred or profane. The case studies included in the book, however, point to a more relational and situational picture. Here I suggest an alternative viewpoint, that is, that the relationship between tourism/pilgrimage and tourist/pilgrim should be seen as a single, simultaneous phenomenon. In other words, in the Chinese context it is more like two sides of the same coin. Secondly, the theoretical problem just mentioned results from the other dilemma the argument is prone to. As the meanings of tourism and religion in the Chinese context differ greatly from those in a Western context, using a non-Western country to scrutinize a Western concept seems to be an easier way of proving that the distinction between tourism and pilgrimage is a false one. One of the differences that concern us here is the perception regarding 'leisure time' and what people 'do' in their leisure time. Without a clear-cut distinction between living domains and the differentiation of religious, recreational, social and economic functions, the social activities of Chinese people appear to be more holistic. Therefore, the argument seems to be a tautology and might not accurately point out the nature of tourism and pilgrimage in modern China.

Despite these logical flaws, it is still undeniable that *Faiths on Display* is an outstanding and eloquent work that sets a new milestone in the study of modern China. It will particularly be useful to researchers and students who are interested in studies of cultural heritage, the tourism industry and Chinese statecraft.

References

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