

**Chinese Common Knowledge,  
Tourism  
And Natural Landscapes**

**Gazing on  
别有天地  
*'Bie you tian di'*  
'An Altogether Different World'**

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....  
(Li, Fung Mei Sarah)

## **Abstract**

Tourism in its modern garb is very new to China. Not until 1978 when the bamboo curtain was parted and the 'Open Door' policies introduced was international tourism welcomed. It is only 21 years ago, in 1984, that was tourism approved by the Chinese Government as an appropriate form of economic development that could contribute to the modernization of the country.

The form that tourism takes in contemporary China, especially the development and presentation of natural sights and sites, demonstrates qualities that immediately set it apart from western forms of tourism development. While there are similar aspects – all part of the ubiquitous spread of 'globalization' – there is much that retains a unique Chineseness that is immediately distinctive. In analyzing the specific qualities of contemporary Chinese tourism it is argued that 4000 years of continuous culture, which has produced a body of understanding known as 'Chinese common knowledge', has been fundamental in directing and determining the way in which natural landscapes are utilized for contemporary tourism. The values inherent in this enduring cultural heritage are an amalgamation of Confucian thought, Daoist and Buddhist theology, folklore and an extraordinarily rich literary heritage in which the poem and calligraphy are regarded as the highest art forms. They imbue every natural landscape with a cultural overlay, drawing upon the immense strength of Chinese common knowledge in ways which make many such sights and sites incomprehensible to non-Chinese visitors because no interpretation is provided - since none is needed for their Chinese viewers.

One outcome of this research is the identification of a Chinese tourist gaze that has many elements which distinguish it from the western tourist gaze. It is highly structured through sociolinguistic parameters which feature correlative and relational thinking (in which no individual entity exists in isolation but is connected to all things around it in dynamic relationships), and this has produced what I have termed 'the relational tourist gaze'. The Chinese value system also includes a degree of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism that stands in opposition to the western biocentric approach to conservation and maintenance of 'naturalness' and 'wilderness.' There is a pervasive view that nature is imperfect and 'man' has a responsibility to improve on nature to forge a symbiotic relationship, these sentiments summed up in the phrase known to all

Chinese: 'man and nature in harmony'. A significant component of a Chinese tourist gaze is thus what I have termed 'the harmony gaze' that contrast strongly with current western notions about wilderness and pristine nature.

This thesis defines Chineseness and Chinese common knowledge, examines the particularities of the sociolinguistics of Chinese to illustrate the way in which this cultural heritage has been transmitted down through the centuries to the present day, and then analyses the manifestation of this knowledge and its attendant values in incorporating natural landscapes - mountains, caves, rivers – in contemporary tourism in China. The result is - '*Bie you tian di*' – an altogether different world.

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