Abstract: The introduction to this special issue draws together certain themes in tourism studies which emerge in the four papers and then, in a postscript, turns to the examination of a major conceptual concern in the study of tourism development. The four papers provide valuable empirical case-study material, three on Malaysia (the Kelau homestay programme in Kedah; the Kapitan Keling Mosque as a tourist focus and presentation of Indian Muslim culture in George Town, Penang; then the ethnic-based Murut Tahol ecotourism project in Sabah and finally a theme park based on the film Alexander the Great, scenes of which were shot on location in Ubon Ratchathani, north-east Thailand); and in the postscript there is a consideration of various expressions of popular culture in Japan, including ‘flash mobs’, performance art events, anime, and fictional pop star concerts and their capacity to attract tourist-related visits to sites of media-generated interest. In their different ways the papers are concerned with the relationships between emerging tourisms, touristic encounters and interactions, cultural expressions and representations of identity.

Keywords: Touristic innovations, case-studies, culture, identity, encounters

Introduction

This special issue of the journal focuses on recent research on tourism development in Malaysia and Thailand, and devotes particular attention to the importance of community engagement and involvement in tourism projects, the sustainability of the tourism enterprise, its contribution to local livelihoods and regional development, and recent interesting innovations and experiments in attempts to diversify tourism products in the context of international competition. The journal issue also illustrates the importance of a case-study approach to tourism studies within particular conceptualizations of tourism activity; the issues of culture and identity or ethnicity and the nature of tourist encounters also surface regularly; and there is an interesting use of concepts to
do with space, place and identity, fictive kinship and gender, and competitive advantage and value chains.

Farah Syazwani binti Hayrol Aziz and Nor Hafizah binti Selamat, in their examination of the expansion of homestay tourism in Malaysia, focus on the case of the Relau Homestay Program in Kedah and the ways in which Malay domestic culture is presented and deployed to generate additional income for women in particular, and the use of fictive kinship as an interactional device between hosts and guests. Then Nor Hafizah and Ezwani Azmi examine the efforts of the Indian Muslim Community Organization (iMcom) in Penang, Malaysia to reconstruct, strengthen and present their culture to their own community and to an outside audience, and to shape and rejuvenate their identity, especially in order to recapture the interest of the younger generations in their cultural heritage. The paper demonstrates a selective reconstruction of primarily tangible cultural elements such as cuisine, traditional games and costumes, which are located and displayed in the ‘functional locus’ of Kapitan Keling Mosque. Giam James Lunkapis explores a local, ethnically-based, designed, managed and delivered, low impact Murut Tahol ecotourism project, Orou Sapulot in Nabawan district, Sabah, Malaysia which is directed to matters of community identity and the preservation of local Murut culture, sustainability and local capacity building and empowerment, and conservation and environmental awareness. It is the brainchild of Richard Sakian Gunting and his son Virgil. Lunkapis suggests that through such ecotourism packages a more ‘authentic’ and ‘faithful’ representation of local cultures and identities might be achieved rather than images and representations generated by outsiders, particularly by commercial and state agencies. In other words identities might be mediated through ecotourism and local community connections - past and present - with their environment.

Finally Nara Huttasin introduces us to a most recent initiative of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the promotion of film-induced, or film or movie tourism, in this case in Ubon Ratchathani, North-east Thailand, where scenes from the film *Alexander the Great*, starring Colin Farrell and Angelina Jolie, were shot. Film tourism is in itself a complex category of activities and interests and not merely a form of tourism which takes advantage of the location where a film was made. This project too generates issues of culture and identity. Scenes of the mutiny of Alexander’s troops at the Beas River, the eastern-most border of his extraordinary expedition was shot in Pha-Taem
National Park in North-east Thailand. This film-shoot has been used as an opportunity to construct a theme park as a tourist attraction, not in the National Park itself but near to national highway 231 and the Moon River, in Thachang sub-district. It is a project managed by the local government authorities, but apart from some displays of artefacts from Greek culture and the provision of film extracts in a 4-D mini-theater, the cultural ambience of the park is entirely north-eastern Thai, with local folk music, souvenirs for sale and cuisine. Local people who work in the park feel no connection with the ancient Greek cultural themes nor do they know anything about them.

There is then a complete cultural dissonance. An ancient Greek implant in North-eastern Thailand holds no meaning for the local population unless they have been trained and informed that for tourism purposes they have to know something about Greek culture. In an important sense this is an absurd example of the meeting of East and West with no cultural exchange and comprehension between the two categories; the implantation of something which speaks to ancient Greek history, albeit recognizing the power of globalization, seems somewhat unrealistic. Undoubtedly film locations which evoke images, emotions, memories and associations, especially if associated with a ‘blockbuster’ film can be a vehicle for tourism development, but there is a whole host of considerations which need to be addressed to ensure that the project is successfully implemented.

Together the papers in this special issue demonstrate the need in the tourism industry to present something unique, something different, though not necessarily ‘exotic’, and provide alternatives to mass leisure-seeking tourism. In my view it would be problematical, for example, to characterize Malaysian homestays as in some sense ‘exotic’; they are certainly culturally different and interesting as an experience for guests, but not radically different, particularly when most of the visitors are from neighbouring Asian countries. The case-studies in these papers also demonstrate what Erik Cohen has referred to, in the case of Thailand, as ‘touristic transition’ and the response of those authorities responsible for the promotion of tourism to the pressures placed on particular sites as well as the need to develop different kinds of touristic assets in an internationally competitive environment (2001a, p. 155-175). For Cohen the main feature of this ‘touristic transition’ which accompanies the ‘depletion of natural attractions’ under the pressures of mass tourism’, comprises the ‘response to the tastes and preferences of the enjoyment-seeking vacationers’
through ‘the increase in the relative number of contrived attractions’ (2001a, p. 171).

Cohen also delineates ‘four principal trends of change’ in Thailand (2001b, p. 4-14). He categorizes these as: (1) ‘massification: from personalized to impersonal tourism’ from the 1970s; (2) ‘expansion: from centralized to dispersed tourism’; (3) ‘heterogeneization: from homogeneous to diversified tourism’; (4) ‘regionalization: from isolation to regional integration’. He also notes the importance of not only international tourism but also the growing importance of domestic tourism. The third stage is especially significant for our concerns here in that Thailand embarked on diversification from the 1980s and departed from its ‘hedonistic’ and ‘exotic’ image to begin the promotion of an ‘amazing’ Thailand image of cultural tourism, festivals, craft villages and ethnic arts, monumental heritage sites, cuisine, ecotourism and national parks, theme parks and amusement parks, and health and wellbeing tourism. This provides an appropriate contextualization for Nara Huttasin’s analysis of the recent development of film-induced tourism in Thailand as a contrived attraction which has no ambition to be ‘authentic’.

Moreover, although Malaysia’s tourism development has followed a somewhat different trajectory from that of Thailand, Cohen’s reference to the later stages of change in a mature tourism market when ‘heterogeneization’ is promoted certainly does apply in the Malaysian case. As Farah Syazwani and Nor Hafizah indicate The Ministry of Tourism and Culture introduced the Malaysian homestay program in the late 1980s specifically to develop an alternative tourism product which would help Malaysia remain competitive in the international tourism market, keeping in mind that the major sources of visitors to the country are from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Brunei), and also China. In some sense homestays can also be characterized as contrived attractions in the process of diversifying the tourism industry. Other more recent innovations in Malaysian tourism development have included educational tourism, health tourism, sports tourism, and agrotourism.

In the case of the Indian Muslim community and issues of identity and the presentation of their culture this too, in its present form, is a recent innovation. The Indian Muslim Community Organization (iMcom) has seized the opportunity afforded by the inscription of Penang along with Melaka as a
UNESCO World Heritage Site and along with the committee of the Indian Muslim Cultural Heritage Celebration (IMCHC) have organized from 2009 an annual presentation of Indian Muslim culture as part of the Penang Heritage Day and the George Town Festival. Finally, the Murut Tahol community of Sapulot in Sabah has also established relatively recently a unique, low impact, low volume ecotourism package, delivered by local guides to differentiate itself from the larger scale kinds of ecotourism to, for example, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kinabalu National Park.

From the outset we should emphasize that the development of niche or alternative tourism programs may simply supplement mass tourism activities; in other words these are usually relatively small-scale activities and they are very unlikely to replace large-scale mass tourism, nor are they designed to do so. This is clear in the film-induced tourism project in North-eastern Thailand. Even if it had enjoyed a measure of success, which it clearly has not with the unfortunate decrease in visitor numbers, it would still have been a minor addition to the major tourism sites and interests in Thailand. Similarly homestay provision in Malaysia which, according to the statistical data, although nation-wide, is concentrated in the Peninsular Malaysian states of Selangor, Johor and Pahang, is a useful addition to the overall repertoire of tourism in Malaysia but it will never provide a major focus for the large number of tourists who gravitate to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka and such beach resorts as Langkawi and national parks like Taman Negara. The same can be said of the sustainable ecotourism package of the Murut Tahol in Sabah; it is a most worthwhile and commendable initiative, but by its very nature it will remain modest in size to ensure sustainability and the appropriate eco-experience of nature and culture for the small groups of tourists who choose this kind of adventure. The Muslim Indian project focused on the Kapitan Keling Mosque is a rather different case in that it is embedded in the historic core of George Town and benefits from the general tourist traffic which passes through in search of the numerous urban sites to gaze upon. The Indian Muslim enclave is but one element in a large-scale heritage tourism industry, and it also serves as a religious space and a place for prayer for Muslim visitors from other parts of Malaysia and from the Middle East, China and elsewhere.

A range of familiar concepts in tourism studies surface in this special issue: the tourist gaze, which still lingers on as a means to capture some of the elements of touristic encounters; host-guest interactions; authenticity and staging; and
the representation of ethnic identities. But there are also some interesting conceptual interventions: in Farah Syazwani’s and Nor Hafizah’s paper, there is a re-introduction, in a tourist context, of the notion of ‘fictive kinship’. In its traditional anthropological meaning it had a different resonance, but here it does serve to capture emotional and personal moments in a visitor’s experience at close quarters of a different culture. In a homestay context the whole point of staying in someone else’s home is to get to know them and to share food and conversation with them; and if this translates into fictive kinship, and the adoption of the guests into the family of the hosts, then all to the good. But this seems to be a fleeting fictive kinship, a brief encounter; it is suggested in the paper that there is continuity in the relationship with the exchange of messages and keeping in touch after departure. But my view would be that this contact does not last long in most cases. It is active during the encounter certainly, but beyond that it will probably disappear. Tourists move on to other destinations and form new, and different fleeting relationships; and Malay hosts take on new customers in what is essentially a commercial relationship. What is also important in the homestay program is the hospitality role of women and their crucial position in domestic affairs which Farah Syazwani and Nor Hafizah quite rightly emphasize.

There is also the additional question raised in the paper of authenticity in the visitor experience, a concept which has been endlessly explored, and constructed, deconstructed, or sometimes discarded. We might venture to add that every tourist experience is in some sense staged, and this also applies to a cross-cultural sojourn in someone else’s home where certain elements of provision are contrived. As the authors indicate additional facilities, like an indoor toilet, have to be installed; levels of cleanliness and presentation have to be raised, especially in the front-yard of the house, the living room and guest bedrooms; depending on the nationality/ethnicity of the guests, the food served is often modified to their tastes, whether visitors are from Korea, Japan, or Pakistan; cultural performances such as a Malay wedding, ‘traditional’ games and a farewell ceremony are staged and adjusted for the benefit of outsiders; local crafts and food and confectionary for sale to tourists are showcased; brief visits are arranged to rubber plantations and vegetable gardens where such activities as rubber-tapping are staged. What is more the hosts are no longer peasant farmers pursuing traditional rural livelihoods; they mainly work for wages in nearby oil palm and rubber estates and in factories.
Another concept which is introduced in this issue is that of Michael Porter in his work developed from the 1980s on ‘competitive advantage’ and ‘value chains’. Nara Huttasin introduces this analytical framework in considering the *Alexander the Great* project. Porter’s is a relatively straightforward framework which specifies primary activities (production, marketing, delivery of products or services) and secondary or support activities (financial and management infrastructure, human resource management, technology development and procurement) and coordination between the two sets of activities in establishing competitive advantage. Nara Huttasin’s analysis is perceptive and convincing, but I would venture to suggest that even without Porter’s framework the conclusions would have been the same. The film-induced project has been poorly planned, managed and supported; it was inappropriately located and placed in a relatively remote region off the major routes of mass tourism; there has been no training of local tour guides to equip them with the necessary knowledge of ancient Greek culture so that the displays and film extracts could be placed in an appropriate context; levels of English of employees at the site are low; the signage is in Thai and not informative; there has been no clear explanation of the objectives of the project to the staff; there has been no noticeable human resource management and development; the project was incorporated into a local government bureaucracy which had no concept of what a theme park was designed to accomplish or skills in realizing a tourism enterprise, ensuring appropriate financial accounting and control, developing a strategy for it, marketing it and providing services for it, and conceiving it in an innovative, transformative and long-term way. From the findings of the paper a passive, locally-oriented administrative culture with no experience or interest in running a theme park pervades the management and operation of the park instead of the adoption of an outward-looking, competitive, market-focused approach.

It seems yet again that the *Alexander the Great Park* is another state-generated development project which was adopted as an element in a regional development strategy within which tourism would play a part, but which had no connection with any local cultural context and no sense of what it would take to make it successful. Indeed, there appears to be a complete absence of the desire to provide a service for visitors, or a realization that to make the project work the managers responsible for it need to provide tourists with an experience which fits in with the main theme of the park. Unfortunately decreasing visitor numbers has also resulted in the reduction in facilities
such as souvenir shops and food and drink outlets. The objective to increase local employment and local involvement in the project and bring additional income into the area has therefore not been realized. On the contrary the theme park has not generated a profit and is a loss-making project supported by government funds. Therefore in Porter’s terms the park has a very low competitive advantage indeed and no effective and positive value chain.

Furthermore, Nara Huttasin’s recommendations, though eminently sensible, seem unlikely to be put in place. Replacing an administrative-bureaucratic culture with an entrepreneurial one, engaging local people, training them, controlling costs, and developing a strategic business plan seem to be unattainable, given the knowledge, skills and motivations of the local staff who are currently employed in the park. However, it seems to me that the overriding problem is the cultural dissonance between ancient Greek culture and North-eastern Thai culture. Yet again it raises the issue of culture and identity in tourism, and, in this case, how the representatives of an Asian culture present, display and interpret a Western classical culture.

Another concept in this special issue which Giam James Lunkapis introduces, is taken from Tuan Yi Fu’s work on space, place, and identity. This argument holds no surprises for those of us who have worked in the field of cultural geography. Places are conceptualized, imagined, and appropriated through a cultural lens; there is then ‘a spirit of place’; myths, legends, sagas and stories provide an understanding and contextualization of a community’s surrounding environment; in this regard it becomes ‘a living cultural landscape’. Moreover, a vital element in the construction and expression of ethnic identity is the establishment and maintenance of an association with space, place, environment and landscape. In addition, the human relationship with a place is not merely a visual experience rather it is an all-embracing sensory experience. In this regard too, as Lunkapis argues in the Murut Tahol case, knowledgeable local tour guides and operators who can recount the cultural and historical context of physical elements of the landscape: rock formations, caves, rivers, waterfalls and rapids, fauna and flora, as well as human additions to that landscape, can undoubtedly add immeasurably to the visitor experience. A cultural-natural narrative is created and presented. Again the issue of an ‘authentic’ as against a contrived tourist experience surfaces in Lunkapis’s paper, but even in this locally-managed project there are obvious elements which are constructed, including visitor accommodation referred to
as an ‘eco-lodge’, and references on the project website and other advertising to going ‘back in time’, to a ‘natural village sanctuary’, to ‘Sabah’s lost world’ and to a ‘head-hunting’ past. After all the local operators of the ecotourism package in a competitive market still have to create tourist attractions for paying customers.

A further observation is worth making: the notion of a ‘touristic space’ emerges in all the papers. Lunkapis makes it a central focus of his paper. But a homestay is also an obvious example of the construction, presentation and management of a space for the purposes of the tourist experience; and the additional refinement of this site in the division between ‘front space’ and ‘back space’. In the case of the Thailand theme park we have an excellent example of an artificially created space, a ‘contrived attraction’ in Cohen’s terms, physically separate from the surrounding village populations and culturally distanced from them. And finally there is the case of the Indian Muslim enclave in Penang focused on the Kapitan Keling Mosque; the Mosque is a defined religious space and has been increasingly transformed into a tourist space which serves a dual function; it provides the stage for a constructed Indian Muslim identity, based on tangible elements of their culture (museum displays of material culture, cuisine and foodstalls [particularly serving nasi kandar and pasembur], traditional games, costume), and presented for tourist visitors from outside the community. But it also serves as a site for the expression and revitalization of Indian Muslim identity from within the community where social activities, lectures, workshops, cookery classes and other educational events are held. What is intriguing in this study is that Indian Muslim identity itself is complex in that those so identified trace their origins from different parts of the Indian sub-continent (Bengal, Kerala, Gujerat, Thenkasi, Malabar, Tamilnadu among other regions); some have been more fully assimilated to Muslim Malay culture, speak Malay, follow Malay-Muslim customs and for most purposes identify themselves as Malay. However, some members of the older generation do not speak Malay and instead keep to their home language of Tamil or Urdu or Bengali. It is clear that given this diversity Indian Muslim identity for both local community and wider touristic purposes has been constructed by such organizations as iMcom and IMCHC.

A final introductory comment seems appropriate. What strikes me in all the papers is the need to address in a more detailed way the national/ethnic composition of the tourists who are visiting these touristic spaces and the
changing visitor constituencies. We have some indication of this in the papers. In the *Alexander the Great* project we hear, on one occasion, of Russian visitors, but presumably with the modest entrance fee of 20 baht for adults, the majority of visitors are Thai. In the homestay program we have references to Pakistanis, Koreans and Japanese, but given that the major sources of tourists are from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries it seems likely that these provide the main markets for homestayers; but we are not told. In the case of the Murut Tahol ecotourism project, the assumption is that the main market is international, given the images of visitors on the project’s website and the comments in such media outlets as TripAdvisor. But it would be interesting to know whether or not Malaysians are embracing Sabah ecotourism. In the case of Kapitan Keling Mosque in Penang it is much more difficult to determine the national/ethnic composition of visitors; visitor numbers are much higher, some visits are casual and fleeting, but it would seem that an important constituency comprises Muslims from the Middle East and other parts of Asia. In examining the character of tourist encounters and their consequences it is vital to have information on the backgrounds and identities of those who are involved in the encounter.

In conclusion, in my view this special issue holds much of interest for those of us involved in research in Asian tourism, both in terms of the empirical material derived from recent field research by local researchers and in the deployment of particular concepts to assist in our understanding of the character and processes involved in tourism development in the region. The papers generate all kinds of questions about the trajectory of tourism in Thailand and Malaysia and more widely. But they also illustrate the often opportunistic and innovative ways in which tourism events and activities are generated, whether successful or not, and they demonstrate that those who wish to take advantage of tourism and the revenues it generates are constantly changing and diversifying what is on offer both for the international and the domestic tourist.

**Postscript**

This special issue also includes a paper by Hideki Endo on the interrelationships between popular culture and tourism illustrated with case-studies from Japan. The editors felt it important to include the paper as it is of considerable conceptual interest, but it did not sit easily with the other four papers in this
issue, though it has some relevance to Nara Huttasin’s paper. Therefore it is included as an extended research note, and it requires and deserves a separate and an extended introductory commentary in exploring the relationship between culture and society, and in reflecting more deeply on the concept of culture.

Endo argues that popular culture and tourism and the ‘cultural and touristic imagination’ are increasingly overlapping, interacting and fusing, and also that certain elements of popular culture which generate tourist mobility to sites of cultural significance and give rise to touristic behaviour and activity serve as a means of projecting ‘soft power’, in Joseph Nye’s terms (2004). In turn, tourism can ‘activate, renovate and transform popular culture’. The relationship is mediated by mobility which in turn serves to connect Arjun Appadurai’s ‘mediascapes’ together with his ‘ethnoscapes’ (1996).

Endo’s main argument is that popular culture needs to be embedded and contextualized in a social matrix, and for him the ‘social’ embraces the political, ‘the political unconscious’ and the ideological. His examples are taken from the extraordinary phenomena and attraction of Japanese anime, Manga, television drama, ‘fictional pop star’ concerts, comic markets (Comiket), projection mapping, performance event art and ‘flash mobs’ which have struck a chord among Asian audiences. Large numbers of people, in touristic mode, travel to the real settings and locations presented in this Japanese fictional cultural world, and Endo, perhaps harking back to Nelson Graburn’s conceptualization of tourism as a ‘sacred journey’ (1989, p. 21-36), styles these travels to celebrate and participate in Japanese popular culture as ‘pilgrimages’. He refers to the motivation to travel, for example, to ‘fictional pop star’ concerts as satisfying the need to travel together, encouraging social communication, and providing opportunities to unite and come together at an event. This resonates with Durkheimian sociology and with concepts of rites of passage and the sacred and profane.

Endo proposes that the cultural studies approach of Stuart Hall and his followers (see, for example Hall 1980) does not capture the current expressions of popular culture and tourism in Japan and the wider Asia. He argues for the importance of ‘social’ elements that have accrued to popular culture. This important proposition requires further contemplation. I would agree with Endo that the concept of culture in a more general sense is primarily a sociological
(and historical) problem and something which is located in and implicated in
societies, social contexts and social relations. However, I think we need to
elaborate this relationship rather more, and not hold to a rigorously ‘social’
and mechanistic explanation of and origin for culture, neither should culture
be seen as totally dependent on or a mere reflection of society or in some way
reducible to it, nor that it simply and straightforwardly ‘reproduces’ society.

As Jeffrey Alexander has said in examining certain dimensions of ‘the
cultural’, ‘[t]he meaning of an ideology or belief system cannot be read from
social behaviour’ (1990, p. 25). In my view therefore culture is in some degree
autonomous and interacts with social relations in dialectical and dynamic
ways; it therefore has the capacity to condition and motivate forms of social
action and to generate social, economic and political change, and it certainly
does this in the field of tourism development. As John Clammer suggests, in
his discussion of ‘subjectivities’, individuals engage in change subjectively;
they have an ‘inner relationship’ with it, negotiate ‘new understandings of
reality and of relationships and expanding or changing conceptions of the self’
(2002, p. 16). Culture lends behavioural quality, content and meaning to social
relationships. It has an imaginative and creative dimension because it is quite
obviously a product of our mental processes and is expressed and embodied in
our language, and we establish an emotional connection with it.

Having said this, and in support of Endo’s position, culture is not a free-floating,
detached agent and it does tend to adhere to particular social forms. In this
connection my views are close to Boike Rehbein’s notion of ‘sociocultures’
(2007, p. 1). What needs to be emphasized however rather than a particular
dimension of culture is that cultural regularities and certain cultural elements
are given more significance, relevance and meaningfulness in the context of
and through the demands generated by the imperative of living and surviving
together. They are also extracted and emphasized in the promotion of tourism
and in the tourist assets that are selected for particular attention. In other
words ‘[i]ndividuals interacting together impose their constructions upon
reality’ and they clearly do so at tourist sites (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, p.
63). Nevertheless, those constructions are not set in stone; they are malleable
and they feed back on social encounters in various ways, particularly in
the context of late modernity with the emergence of groups of specialists
whose professional roles and responsibilities are to produce, reproduce and
disseminate knowledge, symbols and material expressions of culture, and
especially in the field of tourism where culture is constantly constructed and re-constructed and presented by state agencies, tourism operators, guides and intermediaries (and see Featherstone 2000, p.15-16).

Jenks attempts to capture this problematic between what Alexander calls ‘mechanistic’ and ‘subjective’ approaches to culture (1990, p. 1-3) in his discussion of Weber’s sociological methodology and particularly his difficult, one might say frequently obscure concept of an’ ideal type’. In attempting to grasp and analyze culture, Jenks proposes, on Weber’s behalf, that

The state of a culture …. makes reference to the shared individual unconscious held by a people. This is a very diffuse concept but it enables us to reconcile the multiplicity of possible meanings that derive from how any particular aspect of culture appears to different individuals and likewise the multiplicity of different courses of action that may all contrive to give rise to a particular aspect of culture. So social life and the understanding of social life contain strategies….which contrive to bring off a sense of uniformity and singularity in relation to our knowledge of cultural events. We create types, typifications or ideal pictures…’ (1993, p. 53).

Culture like the social order also has certain biological and psycho-physical interconnections which suggests that each (the cultural and the social) is not derived from or dependent on the other in any direct cause-and-effect sense. Social orders (which include both economic and political relations) present opportunities, constraints and pressures; cultural expressions or representations are also used to legitimize, symbolically express and assign values to particular sets of social relations, differences and reciprocities, for example with regard to social class hierarchies or the gender division of labour or the relations between generations or residential arrangements (Alexander 1990, p. 1-27). They do so through the formulation of ideologies which serve to generalize the specific interests of those who formulate them. Yet culture does more than this because it is embedded in and is an essential part of, indeed both a motor and expression of social actions and the choices made in acting, ‘all of which are subjective, intersubjective and volatile – but real, tangible and material in their consequences’ (Jenks 1993, p. 57; Clammer 2002, p. 16-17). The overriding fact is that people ostensibly act
and choose as individuals and they do so subjectively and in terms of cultural meanings and understandings, but they do so in a collective environment in relation to others, and they do so in pursuing their livelihoods and interests and in engaging in economic, political and social activities and in formulating strategies of action and engagement, including in the field of tourism activities and engagements. In my view the relationships between culture, identity and social action and the ways in which they play out in touristic encounters are an essential focus for tourism studies, and Hideki Endo has most certainly captured some of these concerns in his provocative paper on popular culture and tourism in Japan.

Notes

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Tourism, Identity and Recent Innovations


