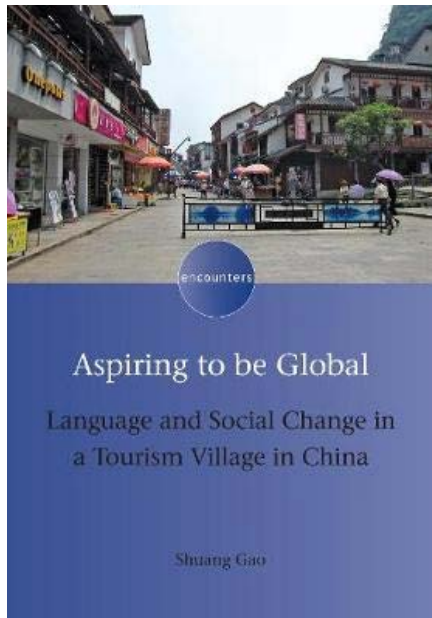


Book Review



Aspiring to be Global: Language and Social Change in a Tourism Village in China

Shuang Gao. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2019. 157 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78892-275-3

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Yangshuo County in Southern China, owing to the stunning natural scenery of the Li River, is one of the first regions in China to open up to domestic and later, international tourism. Against the backdrop of a fast-growing Chinese economy, Yangshuo has seen its English use, teaching and learning, and its own economic development intertwined together over the past decades. The local government's policies to encourage tourism and the economic benefits hence formed a positive feedback loop, with one reinforcing the other. This county then witnessed what would perhaps be perceived as the frontier of commodification of English in China, in that English language is promoted as a part of the "global village" brand. The phenomenon of using English as a commodity as well as a social mobility tool is perhaps more drastic there than in other parts of the country. To investigate the complexity of this lingual and social morphosis, Shuang Gao offers a fairly extensive account for the English language reality in this part of China, providing a theoretical framework, rich ethnographic data, and an analysis of the tourism discourses at the research site.

Gao unpacks the establishment and the dynamics of the global village clearly and logically. A historical account is given for the changes of Chinese people's ideology towards tourism (Chapter 1), dating from the early twentieth Century when residents of adjacent provinces as well as expatriates first gathered in Yangshuo, to the era of the

physical mobility system bound to Chinese *hukou* (residency) and *danwei* (employer), and eventually to the age of a more liberated mentality of travelling after these tense periods. Having clarified this research context, the book presents its overall research foci and justifications of the specific research questions which arose from the initial fieldwork (Chapter 2). Gao then analyzes the tourism discourses that reflect the commodification of a place and the tensions between people from different social groups (Chapter 3 & 4). After that, she examines learning and teaching as part of the tourism development of the place, presenting her interview data as a story (Chapter 5). The book concludes with the theoretical and methodological implications for globalization (Chapter 6).

Gao's book unravels the unique dynamics of learner autonomy in Yangshuo, in that students manage their own ESL learning by constantly mitigating the conflict between their roles as learners and as social individuals. Gao suggests through analysis of the interview data that as a promoted feature of educational tourism in Yangshuo, the opportunity of conversing with an English speaker manifests itself as a benefit or even a commodity of the globalizing China, while at the same time it is perceived by the English-speaking expatriate residents as an invasion. While practicing spoken English, learners are reported to be actively legitimizing their limited social role as interlocutors. Gao depicts this intricacy through the narration of her interviews with ESL students and teachers, presenting their motivation and perceptions throughout the learning or teaching process.

This book evaluates extensively how the construction of the global village relies heavily on its tourism semiotics and in turn contributes to the construction of the *Xiaozi* social identity that values consumerism and hedonism. Gao demonstrates through tourist signage, travel literature, and interview data and offers insights into how the use of English language, arguably as part of the local language repertoire, establishes the *Xiaozi* identity. As part of the self-presentation of Yangshuo, such social identity differentiates itself from those in other parts of China.

While the final chapter provides lucidly articulated reflections on the methodology and theoretical implications of the study, readers would benefit from deeper discussion of China and globalization in relation to the theoretical implications. Notwithstanding this relatively minor niggle, this book, especially the discussion in Chapter 5, would be a particularly intriguing read for ESL teachers of adult learners in China or researchers who are investigating the teaching and learning of ESL in the Chinese context. The interaction between the social and the linguistic aspects of English explained in this book would also be of great value to researchers investigating the sociolinguistics of English within the context of China or Asia.

About the reviewer

Amy Yaqian Xu is a communication advisor and part-time assistant lecturer at the Centre for Applied English Studies, the University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include corpus linguistics and English as a *Lingua Franca*.