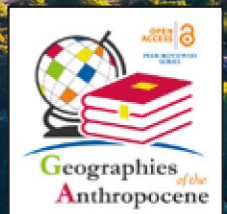


# HUMAN MOBILITY, MIGRATION & TOURISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia (Editors)

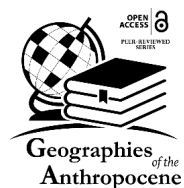
Foreword by Geoffrey Lipman

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# Human Mobility, Migration and Tourism in the Anthropocene

Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia  
*Editors*



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Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia (Eds.)

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## **5. Yangtze River Cruise: a journey through the promotion of fluid developing places and controversial models of sustainability**

*Michela Bonato*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

In the upper middle course of the Yangtze River, there is a long history of difficult navigation, especially in the section of the river that crosses the Sichuan Basin towards the Three Gorges Reservoir. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Western steamboats began sailing to Chongqing, a prefecture seat that later became the provisional capital of China during World War II. The material and ideological presence of imperialist traces caused the political decline of the city during the Maoist period and the first phase of economic reforms in the 1980s. Thanks to the institutional change in 1997, when Chongqing gained independence from Sichuan Province and became a Municipality, the city has been rediscovered due to rapid urbanization, attractive policies to direct foreign funds, and eccentric leadership. In this context, which has also been described in terms of the “Chongqing renaissance,” local tourism activities struggled to position themselves as a valuable economic sector and followed the pre-reform red tourist visit fashion. This paper investigates Yangtze River cruise tourism within the Chongqing-Three Gorges section as an emerging niche category characterized by domestic tourism to the river’s growing visibility and opening up to more globalized forms of elite cruising over the past decade. Building on the assumption that the river cruise tourism sector, particularly in China’s peripheries, is an under-investigated field of research, this study questions the global elite cruise tour models versus local ones in pre-pandemic Chongqing by looking at the local development of the ecological zone. The analysis is based on statistics and discourse analysis of the place’s online promotion through the literally and metaphorically fluid space that characterizes the area. The integration of excerpts from a personal travel journal written during a cruise on a lower-middle-class service boat aims to dive deeper into the emotional atmosphere of the Yangtze River cruise in the historical conjuncture of institutional neoliberal transition. In doing so, the paper highlights the controversial socio-economic and ecological dynamics of interaction that emerge at the

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local level concerning tourism activities. It also reflects on how the concepts of sustainability and ecological civilization are politicized and flow into the local understanding of the place, facilitating the formation of new power networks and territorialization tactics.

**Keywords:**

cruise tourism, Chongqing, Yangtze River, inland port town, ecological civilization

## 1. Introduction

Navigation in the upper middle course of the Yangtze River was characterized by a challenging environment of sandbanks, currents, and whirlpools. Local knowledge was vital to pass through the Three Gorges during the journey to the pre-modern prefecture city of Chongqing until the end of the nineteenth century when the English vessel captain Archibald Little managed to navigate the river upstream. The steamboat docked at Chongqing harbour, and western-driven modernity landed on the Sichuan Basin, promoting the development of the area that became a City and later the national provisional capital during the Japanese invasion of China (1937-1945). The Sichuanese businessman Lu Zuofu succeeded in opening a mercantile navigation company that, despite the Second World War, broadened its interests in Southeast Asia, making it the first example of a China periphery-based cargo fleet operating on a large scale. Due to the distance from the Chinese coast, tourism was relatively rare during the first half of the twentieth century; in the Eighties, Chongqing became a renowned destination of red tourism (Bonato, 2020). The natural resource of water was exploited for energy production; despite the common usage of water for leisure activities such as bathing and swimming, internal waterways were not conceived as a profitable path to develop mass tourism, at least since the 2000s when the concept of sustainable eco-tourism became a tool in the hands of the local government to legitimize the use of water and green resources and monetize the landscape experience (Zheng, 2011; Feng, 2015). Indeed, a world-renowned Western-oriented travel guide describes the city as “a massive and enthralling urban sprawl” that “[...] makes up for a lack of top-notch sights with fantastic food and charismatic geography” (Lonely Planet, 2023). One might wonder whether the *shanshui* experience (lit. “mounts and water,” or inter alia the practice of admiring the scenery) is sufficient to justify the emergence of Chongqing as “the world’s fastest-growing tourism city (World Travel and Tourism Council), recording a whopping 14% growth in its tourism sector” in 2016 (Wong, 2017). In March 2023, the Deputy Director of the Chongqing Municipal Commission of Culture and Tourism, Qin Dingbo, explained how the development of cultural and tourism industries is based on “internationalization, high-end, specialization, and intelligence” (Hui, 2023). This year also defines the post-pandemic power shift in southwest China, where Chongqing is definitively recognized by the surrounding provinces as the hub that holds clear potential for the further development of the tourism sector in the area, for example, through the Chongqing-Chengdu Economic

Circle and the Chongqing-Changsha partnership as “their tourism resources have strong uniqueness and complementarity” (Hui, 2023 reporting Qin Dingbo’s speech).

Defined by Cui as a “powerhouse of cultural and tourism growth” (Cui, 2021), the municipal government invested heavily in the sector during the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), for example in transport infrastructure (RMB 431.2 billion investment). The revenue generated in 2019 exceeded RMB 573 billion, more than double that of 2015. In 2020, the sector also ensured an almost complete recovery to pre-pandemic levels: 64 million overnight trips (64.5 percent recovery compared to the 2019 figure); the added value of its tourism industry was RMB 97.9 billion (3.9 percent of the city’s GDP with a 95.2 percent recovery). During the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, the sector is expected to grow and cover up to 5 percent of Chongqing’s GDP (Cui, 2021).

This study focuses on the Yangtze River cruise tourism within the Chongqing-Three Gorges section as an emerging niche category characterized by domestic and global elite cruising practices. As Bu *et al.* suggest, “China’s cruise tourism is still in its infancy, and its main business mode is to attract international luxury cruise” (Bu *et al.*, 2020, p. 1116). Furthermore, research seems to focus on the main portal coast cities, leaving out the less developed inland river port cities from the mainstream narrative of inbound tourism (Bu *et al.*, 2020; Feng & Dai, 2020; Chu & Tung, 2022; Gong, 2022). Therefore, the choice of Chongqing as a case study was determined by the fact that the sector of river cruise tourism, particularly in China’s peripheries, is an under-investigated field of research, and this study wishes to partially fill in the literature gap by questioning the different tour models in pre-pandemic Chongqing and their impact on the development of the area.

The paper unfolds in the following way. The next section explains the theoretical framework of cruise tourism worldwide and in the market context of the China Sea and internal waterways; the third section focuses on the case study by combining a set of data collected during two fieldworks conducted in the years 2011 and 2015. The analysis is based on local statistics and online place branding discourse analysis. Finally, the last paragraph illustrates some conclusive remarks and reflections on how the concepts of sustainability and ecological civilization are politicized to shape new power networks and territorialization tactics.

## 2. Theoretical framework

What may be described as a practice that merely requires time (Gunderson, 2007) certainly comes with a price, even though recent studies point out how the opening of the cruise sector to a wide target range has contributed to abating costs so that nowadays, “the key determining factor when selecting a cruise is based on point of boarding, routes/ports, and time availability to complete the vacation” (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 39). The Asia-Pacific region, with China in particular, has often been described as “a target” of the Western-led cruise industry, thus creating a narrative of market expansion and standardization which also collimates with the assumption that there is no relevant strategy on the Asian/Chinese counterpart (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 37). This assumption is partly legitimized by the limited literature production in the Chinese language (Hung *et al.*, 2019, p. 215). After the worldwide market impasse of the early 2010s, when the cruise industry was pretty much designed for wealthy retirees and newlyweds, the experience of “luxurious holiday on water” has become a more sustainable business model by attracting the younger population (Parker & Downie 2019, p. 38; Pan *et al.*, 2021). While (three) enormous corporations dominate the market (Jeon *et al.*, 2019, p. 259), over the last decade, China has made significant progress in developing its cruise line by focusing on infrastructure at the Shanghai Port, where ships are manufactured (Howard, 2008; Jeon *et al.*, 2019, p. 267).

The title of “experimental zone” gained by Shanghai Baoshan District in 2012 was upgraded to become “China’s first Cruise Tourism Development Demonstration Zone” in 2019 (TME, 2019). Foreign direct investment by the Italian Fincantieri and the Chinese-US joint venture, China State Shipbuilding Corp (CSSC) Carnival Cruise Shipping Ltd, strengthened the global interest in Shanghai cruise ship manufacturing (TME, 2019). The opening of six other pilot zones along the coast followed, i.e., Tianjin, Shenzhen, Qingdao, Fuzhou, Dalian, and Guangzhou (Si, 2019; Feng & Dai, 2020). Coastal cities, therefore, once again become the protagonist of local industrial reform, emphasizing the centre-periphery as a stereotyped function of Chinese development that solicits a scrutinizing gaze on distant realities and practices. The diversity of sea and river landscapes can be turned into a visual discursive trap by forcing exotic and orientalist patterns (Gunderson, 2007) so that “mysterious” rivers “reveal” some of their most hidden characteristics by producing unsolicited and stereotyped narratives (Kurlantzick, 2005), so that destinations may become part of the “Trade Routes of the Orient” tour within the “faraway rivers and seas” advertising programme (Mogelefsky, 2000):

“Earlier this year [2019], China announced that the ports of Sanya and Haikou on Hainan Island will soon be ready to serve cruises to “no-where.” These cruises, usually one or two nights, aim to be *romantic, exciting and luxurious* vacations on a floating resort at sea. The government is encouraging the development of itineraries that involve, for example, *watching sunrises* at sea, diving and fishing, corporate leisure business trips and private gatherings. Gambling activities will be forbidden.” (TME, 2019; emphasis added).

The atmosphere is certainly a trigger for the functioning of tourism worldwide. The Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing were successfully used to engage foreigners as the tourists were called to demystify the backwardness of the socialist country (Howard, 2008). Foreign corporations also took the occasion to develop specific tourist products:

[...] ‘Because of the upcoming Olympics – Aug. 8 to 24 in Beijing – we thought there would be *some additional interest* in China,’ Mr. Good said. The 8-day trips, which start at \$4,639 [...], stop in Shanghai and Xiamen and sail on the Yangtze River [...] (Gunderson, 2007; emphasis added).

Considering the spatial framework as a symbolic and perceived atmosphere, the cruise sector benefits from sightseeing, which is “the most strongly preferred shore excursion, followed by visiting natural scenery” (Chu & Tung 2022, p. 1). Intended as a holistic experience “in an enclosed environment” (Chu & Tung 2022, p. 2), cruise ship travel also embodies the outer performance of discovering the waterscape that becomes evident along the journey thanks to the onshore excursions. Indeed, according to Hsu and Li, Nature is one of the eight “push-pull factors” (Pan *et al.*, 2021, p. 514), which may help develop motivation in potential consumers together with “Novelty, Escape, [Nature], Leisure, Social interaction, Relaxation, Relationship, and Isolation” (Hsu & Li, 2017). As the high-end service may satisfy all of these amenities, the less luxurious travel package may lack certain services that do not correspond to the travellers’ most essential needs (Kong *et al.*, 2022). Considering the Chinese cultural background, for instance, “authentic Chinese food” as well as the Chinese-speaking crew are considered of high relevance for successful marketing products; the request for “Western elements” should also be fulfilled if the product is advertised as a flag of the Global North otherwise the non-Chinese cruise ship may have no appeal on Chinese potential customers, forcing foreign companies to rethink their approach or

leave the market as it has happened just before the pandemics (Global Times, 2018). The “low price dilemma” of the Chinese cruise market (Hung *et al.*, 2019, p. 213) may also have influenced the decision, therefore eradicating the expectation for profit promoted by the statistics of about five million Chinese cruise passengers and a rising market (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 38; Pan *et al.*, 2021, pp. 512-513) which foreign investors had relied on since the end of the 2000s (TTG, 2008, p. 46).

The Chinese cruise ship market decrease in customers that happened in 2017 was mainly due to the low product appeal, which could not satisfy the local demand (Feng & Dai 2020, p. 193; Guo *et al.*, 2021, p. 225); despite that, there is still hope that short-term cruise products can undermine the foreign monopoly by offering a product suitable for mass consumption (Guo *et al.*, 2021) even though centralized politics on Chinese cruise sector currently lead towards “high-quality and high-grade development” after the initial “high-speed growth” (Wang *et al.*, 2020; cf. also Feng & Dai 2020, p. 188).

Safety concerns remain one of the main constraints against cruising (Parker & Downie, 2019; Chu & Tung, 2022, p. 3; Kong *et al.*, 2022, pp. 542-543); indeed, over the last decade, accidents have occurred both at sea and in internal waterways like the 2015 *Eastern Star* episode that took place in the middle course of the Yangtze River in Hubei Province, and Wushan Mount landslide in the Three Gorges Ecological Zone of Chongqing (Feng, 2015). These facts reached great media coverage, raising doubts over security, and in broader terms, they also questioned the Chinese body as a politicized means of national strength. This kind of disaster may open the floor to more structural issues of power reflexivity while constructing the Chinese ecological civilization (Wang, 2016, pp. 212-214). Chinese customers’ rising awareness of security measures while travelling forces a debate on industrial restructuring despite the relatively new mass performance of cruise shipping.

Based on Hung *et al.* (2019, p. 212)’s comparative analysis of cruise studies published in English and Chinese in the last twenty years, destination management, including cultural and social impacts at the local level, is neglected in the discussion on cruise sector development. Furthermore, Chinese authors show prominent interest in coastal ports, especially Shanghai. The case of Chongqing cruise tourism on the Yangtze River upper-middle stream is based on a mixed-method approach by embracing an ethnographic-spatial point of view, which aims to open the discussion on cruising practices in China’s peripheries and scrutinize the objectifying and politicizing gaze on local waterscape (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 40). Drawing upon the literature mentioned above on market trends, customers’ behaviour, security,

and nature-as-subject, the next chapter investigates the waterscape neoliberal transition in the north-eastern area of Chongqing Municipality, namely during the phase of “high-speed growth” (Wang *et al.*, 2020) after the opening of the Three Gorges area following the conclusion of construction works at the Three Gorges Dam in 2003.

### **3. The fluid path to the Great Wall of Water and back**

The Chongqing-Three Gorges Dam journey started on land with a three-hour bus ride to the embarking port of Wanzhou. As local statistics also suggest, there were clear signs of slow and disorganized development between Chongqing city proper (also called One-Hour Economic Zone) and the functional area of the Three Gorges Ecological Zone; communication routes were significantly affected. Figure 1 shows a considerable discrepancy in the annual GDP of the administrative peripheries vis-à-vis central areas where the GDP is threefold. The average agricultural production in the Three Gorges Area is in line with Chongqing standard production at the end of the 2010s. In contrast, the tertiary sector, despite being the most productive sector of the new Ecological Zone, is still not comparable with the One-Hour Economic Zone level of development. Another major obstacle to the beginning of the cruise was the traffic jam in Chongqing city, as the meeting point was paradoxically fixed at Chaotianmen Port in the city’s historic centre. The organizing team could not find a more congested area even if the choice appeared quite reasonable since people living in the suburbs could find it challenging to reach less famous landmarks within the tortuous urban grid of the hilly city. At the time, urban infrastructure did not match the megacity image (Zheng, 2011, p. 26), and the cruise sector could not take advantage of the rising mass of middle-class tourists driving private cars (Kan *et al.*, 2011, p. 68). One of the most prominent online tour operators working in the Sichuan area, Yangtze River Cruises (YRC), “the FIRST and the BEST online China travel agency,” as described on the website, explains how to reach Chongqing Chaotianmen Dock by air, train or car. By the end of the 2010s, most cruise ships had turned to Chongqing as a place of tour departure or arrival to “taste the natural beauty of the Three Gorges and appreciate the thousand-year Ba and Shu history” (YRC, n.d.). In particular, the city itself “becomes a must-visit place for tourists who are dreaming of cruising Yangtze River” (YRC, n.d.). In the second half of the 2010s, there was a shift in Chongqing’s image towards a sort of metonymic relation between the natural waterscape scenario



and the urban landscape of the megacity. Local administrators promoted this integrated understanding of the municipality's local beauties through Chinese public media, as advertised in Figure 2, where the practice of cruising should embody the state of environmental health and protection of the region and indicate the megacity's development status. The news headline reads: "With green hills and clear waters, Chongqing's power of attraction can just increase!" (Leju, 2018). The average annual GDP increase of around 5.3 percent exceeded an estimated RMB 2.9 trillion in 2022 (Xinhua, 2023). Furthermore, the Three-Year Action Plan to build a "High-Quality Foreign Investment Cluster" (2022-2024) should help keep the overall annual growth of over 10%. According to the secretary general of the Chongqing Association of Travel Agency, Mr. Lee, one objective of the plan is to accelerate "the international promotion of the city of Chongqing and [...] the upgrading of local tourism enterprises" by allowing foreign-invested travel agencies to set up their branches locally and engage in outbound tourism (Zhan, 2022). This policy marks a new direction of governance, whereas the national policies prevent foreign companies from directly engaging in tourism activities; water transport routes are also regulated as a sensitive matter, and foreign investment is generally restricted (Feng & Dai, 2020, p. 193).

As of 2015, 53 tour operators were promoting tours to the Three Gorges, of which 31 were located in the Chongqing Municipality. In the same period, 22 cruise ship companies in China and nine joint ventures offered 54 low-fare cruises and 34 high-fare cruises with three million customers (Feng, 2015). Victoria Sabrina luxury cruise ship made its maiden voyage in 2020 as the "first Yangtze River Eco-friendly luxury cruise" and "the only Yangtze cruise line under American management, [...] providing satisfying international service and care" (YRC, n.d.). Having been chosen by "global celebrities" such as "Julie (the daughter of America's former President Nixon), Robert A. Mundell (the father of Europe currency), Anna Chan Chennault (global famous Chinese American politician) [...], Victoria Cruises it is the advantageous symbol for your noble statue!" (YRC, n.d.). Chinese companies also made use of stereotypical images to describe the ship's high-quality standard, e.g., "[President No. 6 5-star cruise ship] features in the combination of classic European style and deluxe modern comforts" (YRC, n.d.). The ship I embarked on was less than 100 metres long. According to Feng, these small cruise ships were built before 1997 to serve the domestic market (Feng, 2015, p. 11).

After the departure from Wanzhou, my first impression of the cruise ship was as follows:

Even if it is a tourist cruise, the impression remains that it could be a ferry in use for travel within the region. The infrastructure network in the northeastern districts and counties of Chongqing Municipality is still very lacking. As in the past, the river may be the most practicable communication route” (personal diary, September 10, 2011).

Based on the service type distinction (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 39), the cruise ship I embarked on in September 2011 may be classified as a “destination cruise” being offered on board basic service only with extra payment. The service on board and the quality of the overall ship infrastructure revealed the initial state of the cruising market on the Yangtze River after the dam construction. Finding myself in Chongqing as a graduate student conducting a self-financed mission for my final thesis, extra activities could be too expansive, especially during the Mid-Autumn Festival. The total amount spent for the three-day cruise was RMB 1,180 (USD 184.5 or EUR 133.55 at the currency of 10 September 2011).<sup>1</sup> It included a third-class ship ticket and the following onshore excursions: Zhangfei Temple, Jiuwan Stream with *Baidicheng Isle* (the “White Emperor City”), the Three Gorges Dam, and the Lesser Three Gorges, also known as the “Peculiar Gorge under Heaven” where to “get closer to Nature [...] purify your mind and please your eyes” (Chinadiscovery, n.d.). The tariff was the realistic result of a mechanism in which foreign tourists, due to various reasons, may find themselves trapped in a chain of intermediaries who then determine the rising costs of service based on a marketing pattern of “charter ships” or “block group space” characterized by “package cruise tours, tourism intermediaries as main competitors, monopolistic competition, and fierce price competition” (Hung *et al.*, 2019, p. 213). Purchasing the ticket through the hostel manager where I was staying, I paid double the price compared to the local tariff of around 600 RMB my new friend’s father paid for each of his three family members embarked on the cruise ship. The following table (Fig. 3) shows current prices for the season 2023. There emerges how the “cheapest” three-day travel package advertised by Changjiang Cruises for the Yangtze 2 ship (operative since 2011) costs 279 USD, i.e. 1,926.74 RMB. Despite the “reasonably low price,” according to the customers’ comments left on the YRC website, Yangtze 2 is described as “the newest as well as the most luxury ship among Changjiang Cruises” (YRC, n.d.). In September 2011, 279 USD corresponded to 1,783.96 RMB, around 500 RMB more than the price I paid for a third-class ticket.

The standard “three-day” cruise reflected the short-term vacation products suitable for mass consumption (Guo *et al.*, 2021). Even if China is still de-

<sup>1</sup> The currency conversion was made on the website [oanda.com/currency-converter](https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter).

defined as a “developing country” insofar that the working class cannot engage in long vacation periods and typically travel “only 2-5 days a year” (Guo *et al.*, 2021, 226), the cruising business on the Yangtze River has moved beyond this pattern, also offering longer trips from Chongqing to Wuhan and Shanghai (eleven-day travel); however, “the classic Chongqing Yichang cruise line is more popular and frequent” (YRC, n.d.). The cruise I embarked on returned to Wanzhou, where the bus was waiting to bring the customers back to Chongqing.

Low-quality standards and security issues characterized the first “high-speed growth” phase (Wang *et al.*, 2020). The diary recalls that the ship was “old, rusty, and dirty” (Fig. 4). There was, however, a joyful atmosphere on the upper deck:

“Sitting on the ship dock, people spend time smoking, chatting, playing cards, and eating pumpkin seeds. Plastic stools are so uncomfortable after a while; I may return to the cabin to stretch my legs on the bunk bed. Luckily enough, I am assigned the top bunk so that I can watch out of the porthole and even open the window to change the air inside the cabin, which smells stale due to the carpet” (September 11, 2011).

The lack of private space supports the “social gathering” motivation factor for choosing cruise tourism. Even if the majority were retired couples traveling in organized groups, there were also some families and young couples entering as niche customers at the time; nowadays, as part of the new worldwide marketing trend, “inter-generational” cruise package can become an experience of multi-generational bonding (Chu & Tung, 2022, p. 21). Struggling to find time and share moments with their families, the cruise ship may represent a safe space where relatives can stay together and perform parental and filial duties. My roommates comprised an eighteen-year-old girl, her mother, and her aunt. Relocating from Xinjiang to Chongqing for her undergraduate studies, the girl enjoyed the remaining time with her family before the start of university courses. As they entered the cabin, they asked which Chinese ethnic group I belonged to; to be clear, only three foreign people were on board: me and a couple from the US. Crossing other vessels was also rare. On day 2, the diary reads, “So far, we have only crossed paths with one coal transport ship” (September 11, 2011). Analysing the Q&A section on the Yangtze River Cruises website, there emerges how the situation has changed over the last decade: Professional bilingual guides accompany the tours serving customers coming from the Global North and the South Asia region. The number of cruise ships defined as the “best cruise ships under the

top 6 cruise companies” increased to 26 (YRC, n.d.). Finally, great attention is given to food and beverage. At the same time, in 2011, there was no food available for purchase to the third-class travellers who had to make up for this absence on board by exploiting the creativity of the villagers who live near the docks. In fact, around lunchtime, the ship could shortly dock to allow the local population to sell foodstuffs, especially sweet potatoes, grilled fish, and homemade noodles.

The visit to the Three Gorges Dam conveys a sense of relief after the tragedy of displacement and partial destruction of the environment; it also enhances the sense of pride for the motherland for completing a long-dreamed project. The “Water Great Wall” of China (Winchester, 1996) shows the success of the Party in integrated resource management and the possibility to adjust the environment to human needs without neglecting environmental protection, at least in the official discourse of the newly established ecological reserve (Wang & Yan, 1998). In the second half of the 2010s, the heritage-consuming and reifying practices related to cruise tourism have gone beyond the display of objects and the sightseeing experience of culture within the waterscape. One example is the performance called “War and Fire on the Three Kingdoms” (*feng yan san guo*), which was set up in 2016, but it has now become part of the cruising experience as an extra activity:

A large-scale landscape live-action performance created by taking the spirit of loyalty as its soul, the Three Kingdoms culture as its theme, the Yangtze River Three Gorges as its background, and the Three Gorges Harbour as its stage. (Galileo Galilei, 2016)

The performance takes place at Dongxi Lake, Zhongxian County. Although the process of ecological civilization foresees nature as an active actor in societal and economic networks of power, the abovementioned description still suggests that nature may be a passive stage to be cherished by virtue of the beauty grasped through the objectifying gaze.

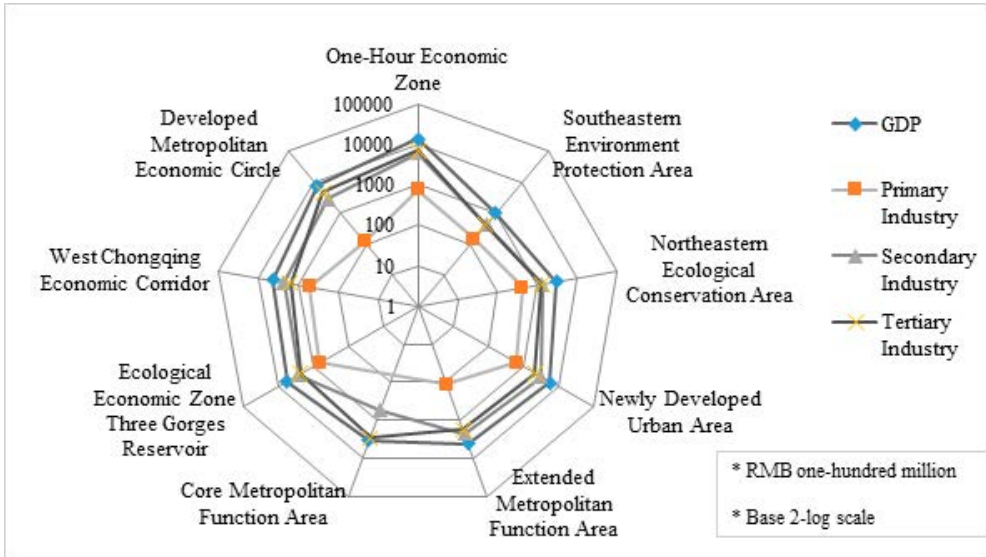


Figure 1. GDP of Chongqing Municipality functional areas in 2016 (drawn by the author using the data retrieved from CTJ 2017, Ch. 2, p. 11)



Figure 2. “With green hills and clear waters, Chongqing power of attraction can just increase!” said Chongqing Local Party Secretary Chen Min’er (screenshot from CCTV13 News, retrieved on Leju, 2018; fair use for academic purposes, <http://cq.leju.com/news/2018-03-14/00006377725523631852136.shtml>)

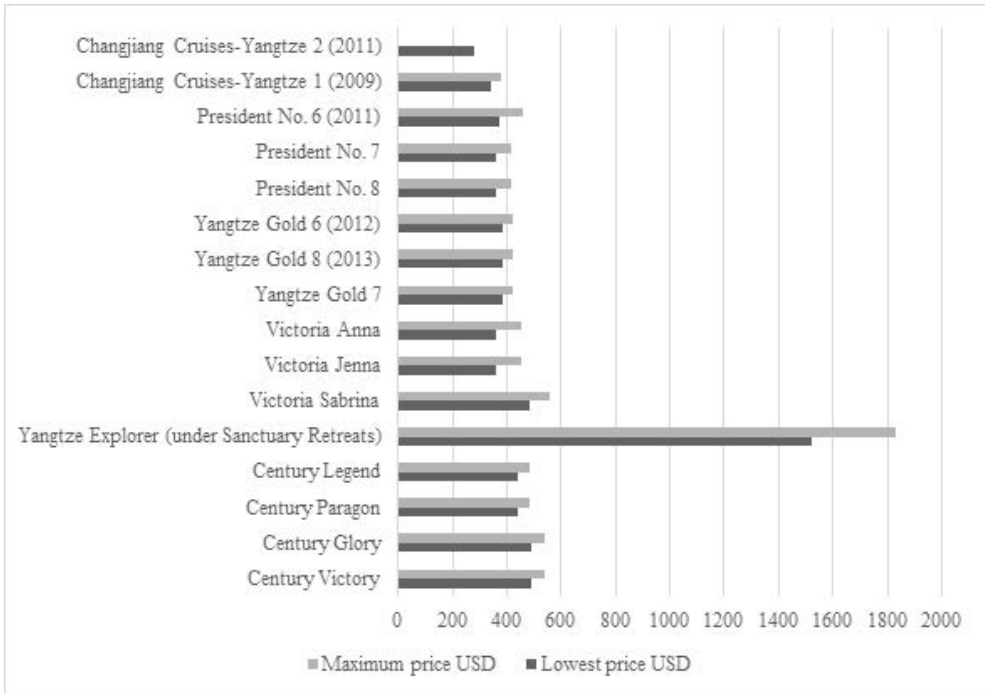


Figure 3 Price comparison of the 5-star cruise ships in 2023 (drawn by the author using the data retrieved from YRC, n.d.)





Figure 4. a) Cruise ship docked at Jiuwan Stream; b) Upper deck with plastic furniture (polaroid by the author, 2011)

#### 4. Conclusions

Within the analytical framework of Chongqing as “the world’s fastest-growing tourism city” (Wong, 2017), the case study reveals a stereotypical idea of eco-tourism based on the fact that the scope of local governance regulation and new policies is to enhance the frequency of cruise travel and the number of ships available, forcing a unified regional imaginary regarding the Yangtze Economic Belt and trying to win the competition against the cruise market in Wuhan (Feng, 2015). The pilot project of management concession to entirely foreign-administered companies shows how Chongqing Municipality is considered an established political reality within Chinese peripheries in the eyes of the central government since pilot policies usually take place in Chinese coastal cities. Within this regulatory framework, the Yangtze River has played an active role as a local development trigger, whereas the Three Gorges Dam has become a national tourist site where the country manifests its pride and grandeur. These two landmarks, the river and the technology, are combined in a unique discourse of urban-rural synergy that can be embodied by performing the experience of cruising the once indomitable river (Feng,



2015). Therefore, according to the integrated urban-rural policies, there exists a metonymical synthesis where the Three Gorges embody the green symbolism of Chongqing City, strengthening the process of national rediscovery of the Chinese south-western periphery. It also places the Three Gorges' intangible heritage on an international platform of the most acclaimed tourist sites in the world (Kan *et al.*, 2011). Within this context, auto-ethnography reveals its validity as a method for inquiring about tourist performance and the entanglement between discourse analysis of the relational mechanisms of place branding and territorialization. By showcasing the orientalist gaze, the mixed method underlines how embodiment may manifest along the process of waterscape objectification.

As Parker and Downie point out, a port of call or transit port “may have a high appeal due to cultural characteristics, natural environment or historical significance or perceived unspoiled beauty” (Parker & Downie, 2019, p. 40). The docks along the Yangtze River in the Three Gorges area in 2011 were often nothing more than an iron dock and rammed earth stairways leading to county villages where the shops used to open only during the cruise onshore excursion. The high potential of tourism in the Three Gorges was still not entirely exploited at the end of the 2010s, prolonging the expansion times of the industry, which remains a niche sector (Fig. 1). Contradictions arise from the search for a status symbol of luxury cruising associated with global lifestyle and noble attitude vis-à-vis the maintenance of low prices to open even more the market to the middle-class thanks to the three-day travel package. However, joint ventures and breakthrough policies regarding foreign cruise ship management may solve the problem of price-service balance. At the same time, Chinese companies should maintain their competitiveness, as expected by Guo *et al.* (2021), by adopting low fares, as the case of Changjiang Cruises-Yangtze 2 demonstrates (279 USD in 2013; Fig. 3).

The overall cruise ship industrial restructuring due to safety concerns (Parker & Downie, 2019; Chu & Tung, 2022) has some characteristics proper of an industry located in a developed country despite the mainstream narrative that still positions the Chinese cruise sector within the framework of a developing country in terms of customers' number and service quality (Guo *et al.*, 2021). While the lower-middle-class service boat on which I enjoyed the cruise experience may still be used as a ferry, moving people who commute for work reasons within the two functional zones of the Chongqing Metropolitan Area and the Three Gorges Ecological Zone, its fate as a cruise ship was already sealed in the early 2010s when the first 4/5-star cruise ships made their maiden voyage on the Yangtze River.

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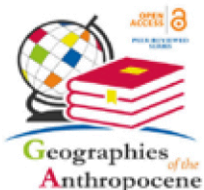
This book offers a comprehensive examination of the dynamic interplay between human mobility, migration, and tourism in the context of the Anthropocene era. The collection of eight chapters delves into various aspects of this complex relationship, shedding light on crucial issues, challenges, and opportunities in today's rapidly evolving global landscape. The concept of responsible tourism is a transversal element in this publication, exploring its significance in promoting sustainable practices and mitigating the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of movement of people. Another topic which is addressed here is the post-Covid regeneration of tourism-dependent island economies. The authors analyze the challenges faced by these regions and explore innovative approaches to sustainable recovery. The discussions here revolve around the importance of community engagement, diversification, and resilience in building a robust and sustainable tourism industry. Sustainability also takes a center stage in this edition. The discourse presented in various chapters examines the pressing environmental issues associated with the movement of people. It also delves into the transformation of the hotel industry and explores tourism opportunities in isolated geographical exclave, shedding light on unique destinations that face challenges related to accessibility and connectivity. Important analysis is also presented on cultural landscapes, heritage sites, and local traditions and how cultural authenticity and meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities can shape the tourist experience.

This book will be of great interest to scholars, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand and navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise in this rapidly changing global landscape.

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