Book Review

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Tourism, Heritage and Commodification of Non-Human Animals:
A Posthumanist Reflection
by: A.L. Lopez, G.J.Q. Venegas and C. Kline (Editors)
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The commodification of animals in tourism arises from complex heritage, economic, and societal factors, prioritising human interests over animal welfare (anthropocentrism). Addressing this issue requires inclusive approach, sustained effort, and alternative livelihoods for those dependent on animal tourism income (Saxena et al., 2024). Lopez et al.'s book Tourism, Heritage and Commodification of Non-human Animals provides posthumanist reflections on the use of animals to gain economic or reputational value in several tourism destinations in Asia and USA. Following the Introduction chapter, the book provides 13 subsequent chapters exploring the complexities surrounding the commodification of animals within the realms of tourism and heritage preservation. These chapters are divided into two parts: one is focusing on humanist perspectives and the ethical debates surrounding animal exploitation, while the other navigates the intricate dynamics of animal-human relationships. Overall, the book can be categorised into four distinct sections.

Section 1 advocates for adopting a posthumanist perspective that recognises the moral equality and intrinsic value of all sentient beings, including non-human animals. Chapter 1 introduces the concept of speciesism, the assumption of human superiority over animals, leading to their exploitation and commodification in tourism for human entertainment and profit. Chapter 2 critiques anthropocentric heritage tourism, which neglects animal welfare, commodifying them as attractions or cultural symbols. It argues for an inclusive heritage approach that respects animals' agency and well-being, addressing ethical dilemmas and moral responsibilities. Chapter 3 challenges the status of zoos as heritage sites, presenting moral arguments against the captivity and commodification of animals. It emphasises ethical issues related to animal captivity, lack of agency, and the absence of genuine conservation efforts.

Section 2 illustrates how animals are commodified and abused in heritage tourism. The authors attempt to recognise animal sentience and reject their exploitation for human economic gain disguised as heritage tourism. Chapter 4 critiques the unethical caging of

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civet cats and drugged for photo-taking purpose among tourists in Bali. The animals were force-feeding them coffee berries to produce the prized Luwak coffee, commodifying civets as production machines, violating their autonomy and wellbeing for tourism profits. Chapter 5 explores the dark tourism around animal markets in the Sonora Market in Mexico, where endangered wildlife is illegally traded as products. Despite its heritage display in nature, the ethical issues around this commodification of animals and the potential risk of public health concerns were raised by the authors. Jallikattu, in Chapter 6, is a bull-taming cultural sport in Tamil Nadu, India. This chapter examines the tension between preserving cultural traditions and ensuring animal welfare, questioning if such practices can be justified. Similarly, Chapters 7 and 8 critique Mexico's bullfighting tradition, which the authors criticised the internal conflict of UNESCO's stand between human rights and animal rights in the aim to preserve the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' status.

Section 3 provides a different perspective of animal commodification through idolisation. Chapter 10 examines how the axolotl amphibian is commodified as a symbol and tourist attraction in Pueblo Mágico (Magical Town), Mexico. It critiques using the axolotl for tourists' enjoyment and recommends the creation of conservation institutions for such vulnerable species. Chapter 11 discusses the "nekonomics" and "kawaii culture" phenomenon in Japan, where stray cats are idolised and integrated into heritage tourism to revive declining local economies. While economically beneficial, it raises ethical concerns regarding the responsibilities of keeping commodified living mascots at tourist attractions such as Kishi and Idakiso stations, and concerns about compromising the cats' autonomy for profit. Besides, Chapter 12 highlights the extensive commodification of pandas in China, alluring tourists through panda-themed attractions in urban and rural areas. The affective economy through the cuteness of pandas is closely intertwined with conservation efforts, giving the endangered species a better chance for survival.

Finally, the authors attempt to connect humans and animals for a meaningful posthumanist interpretation in Section 4. Chapter 9 examines the impact of Citizen Potawatomi Nation's eagle aviary tours in Oklahoma on fostering respectful human-eagle connections, essential for their sacred culture. This equitable, anti-anthropocentric approach challenges animal commodification, advocating for ethical, educational experiences. Chapter 13 delves into Japan's unique human-deer relationship in Miyajima Island through a posthumanist political ecology lens, proposing to recognise it as intangible cultural heritage and promote sustainable coexistence. Chapter 14 concludes by advocating a paradigm shift in animal treatment, emphasising multispecies communities in heritage tourism, ethical principles, and global mutual benefits, thus safeguarding animal rights, agency, and autonomy.

The book is recommended for academics due to its detailed case descriptions, critical analysis, and articulation of posthumanist perspectives. It offers dual-sided insights into animal commodification in tourism, serving as a valuable resource for future research. Emphasising interdependence in human-animal relationships, it advocates for expanding perspectives beyond anthropocentrism to enhance mutual wellbeing. While chapters are generally well-structured, integrating Chapters 9, 13, and 14 could improve the flow of posthumanist reflections.

Addressing animal commodification in tourism demands a sustained, long-term commitment, recognising that meaningful reform requires time and effort. Alternative livelihoods must provide equal or greater income to current practices in tourism. Integrating posthumanist principles into tourism policies challenges anthropocentrism,

promoting a relational, inclusive, and environmentally responsible approach (Thomsen et al., 2021). This shift can lead to a more just, equitable, and sustainable tourism industry. Collaboration between local communities, governments, and organisations like UNESCO is essential for developing ethical alternatives and transitioning away from exploitative practices toward sustainable tourism models. Perhaps, some cases on multifaceted collaborations in promoting multispecies communities' co-existence may further enhance the practical contribution of the book.

References

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