



ENCHANTÉ, PIPAL AVENUE  
PÁL NYÍRI

---

Born in 1972 in Budapest. Undergraduate studies of chemistry in Moscow, Budapest, and New Jersey; graduate training in Asian studies in Oregon; Ph.D. (History) in Moscow; research fellowships in Oxford and Budapest. Areas of interest: human mobility (particularly migration and tourism) and the cultural politics surrounding its management and containment. Ethnographic fieldwork among Chinese migrants in several European countries, as well as in China and Russia. Publications: *Scenic Spots: The Construction of the Chinese Tourist Site and the Question of Cultural Authority* (forthcoming). *China Inside Out*, with Joana Breidenbach (2004). *Transnational Chinese: Fujianese Migrants in Europe*, with Frank N. Pieke, Mette Thunø and Antonella Ceccagno (2004). *Globalising Chinese Migration*, with Igor R. Saveliev (2002). – Address: Macquarie University, Anthropology Department, C3A, Room 629, NSW 2109, Australia.

I don't recall which of the Kolleg's administrators it was who told us on one of the first days that a Fellow is successful if he leaves Wiko having accomplished a different project than the one he had come there for. This insistence on productive serendipity struck me as a sound criterion. Did my stay measure up to it?

Just staying among smart people, day after day, recharges a person's energies and restores his inner balance enormously. It is singularly satisfying to review the dinner tables around oneself and reflect on the many ways in which people can be interesting. These benefits of "spontaneous conviviality" – as Yehuda Elkana calls it – would have made me happy at the Wissenschaftskolleg regardless of output. But the year has, as it were, been

the most productive I have had – due in equal measure to the resources provided by the Kolleg and to the serendipitous encounters.

After over a decade of research on international migration from China that seemed to have produced all of the new insights I had been capable of, I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg looking for a new intellectual paradigm and determined to produce something new and important. I brought with me an ill-defined bundle of ideas relating to the emergence of tourism among non-western populations. I brought along field material from new tourist sites in China and Russia, sensing that the way they are created and consumed somehow does not fit established western ways of being a tourist and hoping that uncovering the cultural politics that account for these differences would tell me something about the contemporary ways of being Chinese or Russian. What the output of this thinking process should be was not entirely clear, but a couple of articles that I could then use as a starting point to reframe my previous research on migration seemed the most likely outcome.

Yet by winter, I found myself, to my amazement, writing a book on the creation of the Chinese tourist site. What drove me in this direction was, first of all, the unlimited access to literature – including, thanks to the impressive collection of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, more Chinese-language sources than I have ever had on my shelf. This abundance of sources directed me towards a more historically grounded method than I had employed in my previous research, opening up a perspective on the connection between contemporary processes and the premodern view of Chinese travel and even enabling me to reconstruct premodern travellers' views of the very site I had been working on, in the north of Sichuan Province. Since my own skill at dealing with classical Chinese sources had rusted considerably, I was fortunate to benefit from the presence at the Kolleg of two outstanding Sinologists, Rudolf Wagner and his wife Catherine Vance Yeh. Rudolf's fluency in both the classical and the contemporary Chinese context, Cathy's sensitivity to the politics of Chinese language and visuality, and their inspiring and generous personalities were a great asset.

As I was writing, I became increasingly conscious of the questions about space that my research raised. I maintained that the tourist site in China – the “scenic spot” – was a bounded and standardized enclave. But how to describe the sense of standardization? What spatial markers characterize ways of constructing and consuming the scenic spot? The presence of human geographer Jacques Lévy, with his interest in urban space, got me started on a new line of thought, which I hope to explore further in my next book.

A great deal of stimulation came from regular meetings with the Cultural Mobility working group. Its launch was accompanied by a great deal of anguish regarding the compatibility of terms between its five “permanent” members (Greenblatt, Guentcheva, Paul, Županov, and myself), coming as we did from a wide variety of fields, ranging from 16<sup>th</sup>-century English literature to contemporary Chinese migration. Though the sense of pressure to develop a set of common terms or, better, a common theoretical framework never relented, we realized that we would accomplish much if we could only convey our shared optics of society – making the scrutiny of the small, the mobile and the transient the centerpiece of sociocultural inquiry – to the mainstreams of our respective fields. This gradually took the shape of a book, now in progress. In the process, I gained just what I wanted: an outside view of my own intellectual baggage and new tools and confidence to reconsider it. (Talking at the Tuesday seminar, with its rare luxury of getting the critical attention of a select audience outside one’s field, was equally instrumental in this process.) What is more, I experienced many times of genuine intellectual fellowship, many of affection, and even some of true friendship. It is not easy for intellectuals – especially Europeans; Americans are better at this – to admit to actually enjoying conviviality that is, ultimately, stage-managed; yet, I suspect, more did so at heart than cared to advertise it.

Speaking of friendship, Berlin provided me with a year of intense collaboration also with my long-time co-author, Joana Breidenbach, who read my manuscript several times as it was getting longer. Meanwhile, Joana, who had participated in some of the fieldwork in China, completed her own book, in a rather different genre, a reflection on being an anthropologist and a mother who travels with another – in her narrative somewhat manic – anthropologist to research travellers. During the year, Joana and I also developed, for Viadrina University in Frankfurt (Oder), an online course for students of public policy on how to deal with “expertise” in the social sciences – a project that echoed the concerns of another thematic group at the Kolleg, that on Science and the Public.

Before I came to Berlin, I had decided that I would be staying off campus. The decision resulted from the combination of a misunderstanding about housing arrangements, having chanced upon the perfect flat, and the desire to be in the midst of the city that, I knew, was becoming one of the prime destinations of Chinese tourists in the wake of the signing of an agreement between China and Germany just before my arrival. I was determined not to miss out on either the organized or the “spontaneous conviviality”, but I also planned to cruise some more with Chinese tour groups along Pipal Avenue – as one Chinese guidebook chose to call the Unter den Linden – as part of my work on mapping the Chinese

tourists' Europe. In the event, though the number of Chinese tourists soared as predicted, writing and conviviality left no time for following them. Still, driving to work every day only blocks away from where my grandparents once lived, I took in the reassuring optimism of Europe's homeliest capital – the model postsocialist city – and its disarming desire for diversity. The American chapel where my grandfather, a citizen of socialist Hungary, dodged authority to participate in a performance of Händel's *Messiah* probably no longer exists, but I am glad I could recall him by introducing to my Fellows an aria from Halévy's *Juive* that I had once heard from him. The story of the sacrilegious desire to marry a Jewess must have resonated with him personally, for it was just for that reason that he had been forced to leave Berlin for the first time.

Oh, and it got written, the new and important book. By the time I was leaving, I received the first – positive – reader's report on *Scenic Spots* from the University of Washington Press.