The theme of identity is omnipresent within discourse about tourism (Lanfant 1995, 30).

In a study widely seen as inaugurating contemporary tourism studies in the social sciences, Dean MacCannell (1976, 5) counseled his readers to “follow the tourists” to understand the nature of modern identity. “By following the tourists,” he suggested, “we may be able to arrive at a better understanding of ourselves.”

For MacCannell, “ourselves” were the middle-class residents of the modern, Western societies who constituted the vast bulk of tourists, both international and domestic. But a number of anthropologists and sociologists were soon drawn to what tourism meant for the identities of others—most notably those people in non-Western societies who were increasingly becoming tourist objects themselves. In particular, the fate of ethnic identities and cultures in developing countries became a focus of debate in a fast-growing research literature. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, edited by Valene L. Smith (1977), was an important early contribution to this literature. A year earlier, UNESCO (1976, 75) had proclaimed—perhaps prematurely but certainly presciently—that tourism, “more than an economic phenomenon with social and cultural effects, has become a phenomenon of civilization.”

Despite tourism’s global reach and economic significance, its importance for the understanding of ethnicity in the modern world
has been generally neglected within the field of ethnicity studies, with a few major exceptions such as the work of Pierre van den Berghe and Charles Keyes (see their jointly edited issue of *Annals of Tourism Research* on ethnicity and tourism in 1984). Tourism is rarely mentioned in most of the major journals on race and ethnicity or in the periodic literature reviews of the field, apart from an occasional dismissal as an agent of the commoditization and, therefore, the degradation of ethnic culture.

Yet just as MacCannell suggested that tourism provided a way of understanding the modern identity of tourists, so it may be suggested that tourism provides a way of understanding what has been happening to ethnicity. With the proliferation of ethnic tourism, of ethnic museums and theme parks around the world, and of ethnic artifacts consumed not only by tourists but also by members of ethnic groups as assertions of their ethnic identities, ethnicity itself has become increasingly commoditized in specifically touristic ways. Indeed, one observer has gone so far as to suggest that:

> Cultures of all types—ethnic, national, regional, and the like—that are able to translate their qualities into marketable commodities and spectacles find themselves maintained, experienced, and globalized. Cultures that cannot or do not (re)present themselves in terms of marketable qualities, simulated instances, experiences, and products are finding themselves divested of members. In particular, traditional cultures . . . find that the way to keep their members interested in maintaining their culture is to involve the young people in the marketization of the culture, especially as touristic spectacle, through their music, dances, food, clothing, and ornamental items. This allows the youths to have incomes and, thereby, the ability to participate in the larger global market. . . . Cultures that cannot succeed in translating some of their qualities into spectacles or commodities seem to vanish only to become museum items (Firat 1995, 118).

This provocative analysis certainly challenges many presumptions about ethnic culture and commoditization and points to one of the central paradoxes of modern ethnicity—that its ability to facilitate participation in the global market may provide its appeal. However, Firat’s analysis, like much of the earlier literature on tourism and ethnic identity, does not sufficiently consider the distinctively political sources of ethnic identity, particularly in terms of state policies and access to state resources. This consideration seems especially important in those societies where, on the one hand, states are striving
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to foster new national identities and to reconcile ethnic diversity and modern nationhood and, on the other hand, local people are finding they must increasingly negotiate their identities in arenas of intrusive state control.

The already complex task of reconciling ethnic and national identities has often been further complicated by the development of tourism. State elites have been primarily drawn to tourism for its economic benefits, although, as Richter (1989) and Leong (1989) have emphasized, there is an affinity between nationalism, regime interests, and the touristic promotion of a place as uniquely attractive. The marketing of ethnic diversity for tourism poses complex issues for states, however. How are ethnic divisions, symbolized by ethnic markers selected for tourist promotion, reconciled with national integration and the assertion of a national identity? Will ethnic tourism bind ethnic groups more tightly to the national political economy or will it reinforce their sense of separateness and potentially provide them with resources to resist integration? How will interethnic relations on local, regional, and national levels be affected?

These issues are particularly salient in many parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands, where ethnic diversity is pronounced and where ethnic identities have long been recognized as being particularly fluid. The region has the fastest growing tourism industry—both domestic and international—in the world. The interplay between the region’s rapidly growing tourism development and its ongoing processes of ethnic construction in new and evolving political contexts is the central focus of this book.

Four of the chapters in this volume (by Adams, Michaud, Picard, and Wood) are updated versions of papers presented at the World Congress of Sociology in Bielefeld, Germany, in July 1994, at a session entitled “Tourism, the State, and Ethnicity,” organized by Michel Picard under the auspices of a working group of the International Sociological Association (ISA), which has since been upgraded to the ISA Research Committee on International Tourism. While a number of individuals have been instrumental in securing this official recognition of tourism studies within both sociology and anthropology, the editors particularly want to acknowledge the important organizational and intellectual contributions of Marie-Françoise Lanfant and Krzysztof Przecławski.

In deciding to make these papers the nucleus of a book, we chose to focus on Asian and Pacific societies, partly because of our own research interests and partly because of the ways in which the nature
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of ethnicity in these societies poses particularly interesting and instructive questions about the intersection of the international tourism industry, state policies, and ethnic identities and relationships. Given this context, we solicited four additional chapters (by Kahn, Leong, Linnekin, and Oakes) to expand coverage of the region. We are aware that a number of interesting and important cases are not included, but we believe that the case studies in this volume provide a basis for significantly advancing our understanding of the dynamics of tourism, states, and ethnicity in the region.

It is commonplace to observe that it is an extremely difficult task to sort out the “impact” of international tourism from the many other sources of change in rapidly modernizing Asian and Pacific societies. But perhaps the more fundamental observation is that tourism does not do its work primarily from the outside. As an important part of broader processes of globalization, tourism has become an integral part of virtually all national societies, as the UNESCO statement quoted earlier implies. It no longer makes sense to conceive of tourism as a force external to contemporary societies, impacting them from the outside. What needs to be studied is how tourism has become institutionalized in different states and societies and how tourism alters incentives and opportunities for local actors in ways that unleash new and unique processes of change. As the case studies in this volume demonstrate, the responses of local actors to tourism have often been energetic, shrewd, and unpredictable. The often unintended results have included significant changes in the conceptions and markers of ethnic identities and in the relations between ethnic groups themselves and between ethnic groups and the state. These findings convince us that attention to both international and domestic tourism must be part of any adequate analysis of ethnicity and politics in the contemporary world.

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