

Bihu (Tiger) Wu: the tourism scholar ironman of China

Introduction

It was not an easy task to craft a portrait for Professor Bihu (Tiger) Wu, although both authors have been acquainted with Tiger for nearly twenty years, as colleague (second author), former student (first author), and very close friend. Wu is a professor at College of Urban and Environment Sciences, Peking University, China. He is the founding director of the International Center for Recreation and Tourism Research (iCRTR) at Peking University. iCRTR was one of the first organizations devoted to the tourism research and education in China. As a researcher, Tiger excels both in geography and in “tourismology” (the term he created to refer to tourism studies, see Wu, 2010, p. 177). Three of his many publications (Wu, 1994, 2001; Wu et al., 1997) in geography rank in the top ten in terms of impact in the past three decades (ranked first, third, and fourth, respectively). Two articles published in *Acta Geographica Sinica* (Wu, 1994; Wu et al., 1997), the most prestigious journal in geography in China, were awarded 4th and 15th place for high citation in the 80 years since the journal was established.

In the field of tourism, Wu is recognized as one of the most innovative and productive Chinese scholars who made a “significant contribution to the development of tourism as an academic area of work in China – especially for destination planning” (email correspondence with Professor Chris Ryan, 15 September 2017). Tiger’s research impact was the highest among all Chinese scholars from 1982 to 2012, publishing over 220 journal articles and authoring or co-authoring 12 books and 34 edited/ translated books and conference proceedings. He also made more than 100 conference presentations. His *magnum opus*, *Regional Tourism Planning Principles* (published in 2001 and 2010 by China Tourism Press), was commented as distinguishing “itself from other texts on tourism...include Clare Gunn’s two books ... and C. Michael Hall’s ...”, demonstrating his “profound knowledge of regional tourism planning” (Morrison & Cai, 2002, p. 640), and making “a significant contribution to the research and practice of tourism planning” (Morrison & Cai, 2002, p. 641). The book ranks 8th in academic impact among all Chinese books in humanities and social sciences.

Wu is an active member of several associations and committees. Domestically, he is a member of the Advisory Committee of China

Tourism Reform and Development, China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), and the Founding President of China National Conference on Historic Villages. Internationally, he is the founding member and Secretary-General of the International Tourism Studies Association, the first China-based international academic organization in tourism providing a platform for collaboration among tourism scholars within and outside of China. Due to his achievements in tourism geography and planning, Wu was elected in 2015 as a Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism, which is the world's most elite honorary organization for tourism scholars.

Apart from these recognitions as a scholar, Tiger is known as a practitioner and knowledge diffuser, actively applying his research into the practice of tourism development and planning in China. Jafar Jafari commented that “he (Tiger) knows both the theory and practice of tourism; few tourism scholars fall in the category” (email correspondence, 17 September 2017). Tiger has served as the Principal Investigator for more than 100 tourism planning projects in Mainland China, ranging from provincial to local levels. He has made over 400 speeches to executives and government officers. Tiger is regarded as “the most significant knowledge broker that bridges academia and industry in China” (personal communication with Mr Shunli Gao, former President of China Tourism News, 11 September 2017). This rather long resumé only partially sheds light on who Tiger is as a scholar and practitioner. To portray a broader picture of Tiger, the authors had many conversations with his colleagues and peers, collaborators, and former students. Individuals who shared their perspectives for this portrait included Professor Jafar Jafari (University of Wisconsin-Stout, U.S.A.), Professor Chris Ryan (University of Waikato, New Zealand), Professor Yanjun Xie (Dongbei University of Finance & Economics, China), Mr Shunli Gao (China Tourism News, China), Ms Xiaoyan Qiao (Overseas Chinese Town, China), Dr Honggen Xiao (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong), Dr Lina Zhong (Beijing International Studies University, China), Mr Ping Su, Ms Xiaolan Yang, Dr Lan Xue (Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.), Mr Tao Xue (BES Cultural Tourism Group), Dr Yiyi Jiang (China Tourism Academy, China), Dr Xiaobo Xu (Shanghai Normal University, China), Dr Xiaoting Huang (Shandong University), and Dr Ning Dang (East China Normal University, China).

A researcher

Tiger was born in a poor village in North Jiangsu Province in 1962 when the entire country was struggling to recover from the three-year natural disaster period when millions died of starvation. Despite the ever-present feeling of hunger, he was fortunate to be given the opportunity to receive a formal education, thanks to both, his parents and the then Party President, Deng Xiaoping. He was admitted to the Department of Geography at East China Normal University (ECNU) in 1980. Wu received his degrees of Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Science, and Bachelor of Science in geography from ECNU (1984), and spent 17 years there both as a student and as a faculty member. Being invited by Professor Lu Peiyuan, the then Department Head, he joined the Department of Urban and Environmental Sciences at Peking University as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow (1997). He worked closely with late Professor Chen Chuankang, “the founder of contemporary tourism geography and tourism planning studies in China” (Wu, 2010, p. 173), Professor Wang Enyong and Professor Guo Laixi after the passing away of Professor Chen (1997). Wu became a faculty member of Department of Urban and Environmental Sciences at Peking University (1999).

His destiny to be a tourismologist was determined by his vast interest in various disciplines and his passion to explore nature and culture. Xiao Honggen recalls:

As a human geographer engaged in travel and tourism research, Tiger is a ceaseless and tireless learner, as much as a curious and keen explorer on the way. I remember we travelled together to the 2010 ISA World Congress of Sociology in Goteborg, where he was to assume his term of co-presidency of the International Tourism Working Group. As side trips after the Congress, we explored Oslo and Copenhagen as “serious” tourists and travel researchers. In the Chinese spirit of learning from the West for applications, Tiger performed his part as a fictional county magistrate where I served (or acted) as his secretary. With these staged-up roles, he was able to probe and learn about city planning and urban tourism development through “real” encounters and conversations. I could tell that the locals were totally amazed by the types of questions he raised and the way he asked them. (email correspondence, September 20, 2017)

Tiger's path in academia was in four stages as he has described in his autobiography: a physical geography student who was crazy about Chinese literature and history, a human geographer, a tourism geographer, and a tourismologist (Wu, 2010). This can be seen from domains of his publication over the years as shown in Figure 1. Before 1999, Tiger mainly examined tourism phenomenon from a geographical perspective, later expanded to wider aspects of tourism including knowledge development in tourism (e.g. Zhong, Wu, & Morrison, 2013), tourist behaviour (e.g. Cong, Wu, Morrison, Shu, & Wang, 2014; Zhang, Morrison, Tucker, & Wu, 2017; Zhang, Tucker, Morrison, & Wu, 2017), tourism in heritage sites (e.g. Gao & Wu, 2017; Li, Wu, & Cai, 2008), destination image (e.g. Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015; Zhang, Wu, Morrison, Tseng, & Chen, 2016), rural tourism (e.g. Sia, Wu, Park, Shu, & Morrison, 2013), and so on.

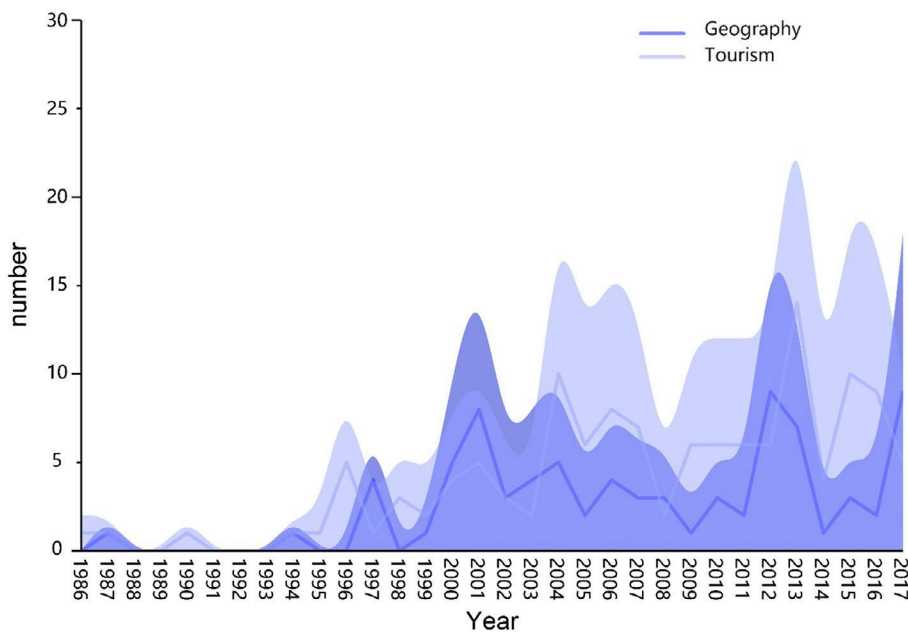


Figure 1. Domains of publication (1986–2017).

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in physical geography from ECNU (1984), Tiger was admitted to the Master's programme in the

same institution (1984). The legacy of following the then Soviet Union-styled curriculum design, in which great emphasis and resources were given to science education, left the liberal arts obsessed Tiger not much choice and he started to pursue his Master's in Human Geography under the supervision of Professor Chu Shaotang. Chu is a historical geographer and his area of study was the travel history of China. This gave Tiger his first academic exposure to tourism. Tiger's passion for tourism was stimulated by a talk on tourism geography made by Professor Chen Chuankang at ECNU in 1985, and was later enlightened by his encounter with *Recreation Geography* by Stephen Smith in the ECNU library, which was one of the very few university libraries with literature in foreign languages at that time. The Chinese version of this book was translated by Tiger and published in 1992 by the Beijing-based Higher Education Press and later by the Taiwan-based Garden City Publishers in 1996. The 1990s was a remarkable period for the tourism industry in China as it gradually became an important sector of the national economy. Favourable policy was formulated to encourage development and enormous funds were invested on tourism resource development, infrastructure and facility construction, education, and research. To capitalize on the opportunity, many universities in Mainland China started to run tourism-related programmes, although under different names. ECNU established the Department of Tourism Education (as a Normal University, everything had to be related to education even if only nominal) in 1992. Tiger was transferred to the new department from the Department of Geography and "officially" became a researcher in tourism.

When being asked about the critical "milestones" in his career as a researcher, the first one to pop up was his first major research grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) in 1992. The study investigated travel behaviour patterns of domestic tourists in China from a geographic perspective. This grant laid a solid foundation for his endeavours as a tourism geographer.

Based on its findings, he identified the geographical patterns of Chinese urban residents' domestic travel behaviour (*Wu's Curve*), and proposed the concept of the *Recreational Belt around Metropolis (ReBAM)* to describe the spatial patterns of recreation/tourism facilities around urban areas. Articles on *Wu's Curve* and *ReBAM* were published in top-tier journals of geography and tourism including *Acta*

Geographic Sinica (Wu, 1994; Wu et al., 1997) and *Annals of Tourism Research* (Wu & Cai, 2006). One of the byproducts of the unprecedented growth of Chinese economy since the 1990s was the remarkable increase of tourism, both in terms of numbers of trips made and total expenditures. This rapid development exemplified the *ReBAM* theory in various contexts, and provided incomparable opportunities for Tiger to further develop the theory. Informed by *ReBAM*, several graduate students completed their dissertations under Tiger's supervision and many publications were generated. Without doubt, *ReBAM* is one of the key theories in urban tourism, tourism geography, and tourism planning, which encouraged thousands of publications as shown by Google Scholar.

Planning is an important application of geography and geographers were always pioneers in tourism planning. Tiger was not an exception. After getting involved in several tourism planning projects in Shanghai (1994, 1995, and 1996), Wuxi (1995), and Lunan (1995), Tiger started to reflect on the foundation, principles and guidelines of regional tourism planning. This became the study area for his postdoctoral research. According to Tiger, the second important milestone for his career was being a Visiting Scholar at Purdue University in the summer of 2000. Being invited by Professors Alastair Morrison and Liping Cai, Tiger spent several months in the tranquil surroundings of this top research university, immersing himself in seemingly endless reading and writing about tourism planning. By the end of his Visiting Scholar stint, he finished the first draft of *Regional Tourism Planning Principles* (2000). The experience at Purdue University was very important to Tiger because it was his first international exposure and laid the foundation for his contributions to international collaboration between China and other countries. Mr Gao commented, Tiger "has made significant contributions to the international collaboration in the field of tourism".

Tourism research in China is dominated by theories and frameworks developed in Western countries. Although a theory is meant to be universally applicable, researchers in China were always eagerly calling for conceptual approaches that were applicable to China's unique situation. In this sense, Tiger is undoubtedly one of the most innovative Chinese scholars developing and applying original theories from and for China's tourism.

A knowledge broker

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the rapid development of tourism in China, providing Chinese tourism academics an unprecedented platform to apply their theoretical constructs and creative thoughts. This became the focus of the second stage of Tiger's career: to blend academic knowledge into practice and to conduct practical research relevant to the development of the tourism industry. *Regional Tourism Planning Principles* provided a starting point for such a shift. Among all the original concepts proposed in the book, probably the *1231 framework*, the *Resource-Market-Product (RMP) framework*, and *ReBAM* were to become the most well-known and widely applied. The former two delineated the steps to be followed when preparing a tourism plan. Although proposed 17 years ago, these approaches remain relevant and are applied by many tourism planners in China. The behavioural patterns of urban residents and spatial patterns of tourism/recreation facilities around cities, as described by *ReBAM*, provide the guideline for most, if not all, urban destination planning. It is fair to say that *ReBAM* has become an indispensable component of urban tourism planning in China. Apart from providing the theoretical groundwork for tourism planning practice, Tiger has actively participated in over 1,000 tourism planning projects to various degrees: as Principal Investigator, member of expert teams, and reviewer of planning reports. As Principal Investigator, his planning consultancy projects cover almost all major urban destinations in China including Beijing (1997), Hangzhou (2003), Xi'an, Lhasa, and Chengdu. The Hangzhou Tourism Master Plan set a new benchmark for tourism planning. While many urban destinations at that time were striving for attraction admission ticket income, the Hangzhou plan suggested a shift from sightseeing to leisure and vacations, revitalization of heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage, and development of the Grand Canal, for which Hangzhou was the southern startpoint.

To bridge the gap between academia and the industry, Tiger conducted destination-based research with research problems generated from practice. As shown in Figure 2, his research covered 19 provincial-level regions. He launched the journal, *Tourism Planning and Design*, with China Architecture and Building Press in 2010. This publication is patterned after the *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* but focuses on tourism planning, landscape architecture, and tourism destination management. The journal has published 24 volumes since its foundation and has become a must-have item for practitioners and government officers. Capitalizing on his academic achievements, Tiger also provides professional advice on tourism development for state government on policy formulation, resource allocation, destination planning, and destination management. As an active member of the think tank of CNTA, Tiger led a group of experts to develop the *Best Tourist City*

Evaluation Criteria (BTC) in 2001, a first of its kind across the globe. And building upon this, Tiger was appointed in 2011 by CNTA as the Principal Investigator to develop an attractiveness index for urban destinations. BTC have been widely applied as a development guideline by many urban destinations in China in the past decades.

In traditional Chinese culture, devotion to academic research is only part of the role a scholar should play in society. Importantly, a scholar should cultivate himself, regulate his family, and govern the state to achieve world peace (Zengzi, 505–437 BC). This philosophy has been the principle for many scholars in China, including Tiger. Apart from being productive in research and publishing, Tiger is eagerly sharing the most updated research, best practices around the world, and his own academic thoughts via various channels with enterprise executives and government officers from national to county levels, especially the latter since in a socialist market economy like China, government plays a vital role in every aspect of industry. It is sad to say but in many occasions, only the top leaders (normally the Party Secretary) have the final say on the strategic direction of destinations and these people may have limited knowledge about tourism. Keeping the actual decision-makers well informed and educated is therefore a huge challenge for the sustainable development of tourism. Working closely with public agencies, Tiger has delivered more than 400 speeches to government officers. His talks have influenced over 10,000 attendees working at the front line of tourism development and governance, as well as the decision-makers. Ms. Qiao Xiaoyan from Overseas Chinese Town commented, “*Professor Wu has made significant contributions to tourism development in the country through knowledge dissemination*” (personal communication, 15 September 2017). *Tiger also enthusiastically shares his thoughts about various social and environmental issues, and even criticizing public policy in different media, which demonstrates “a strong sense of social responsibility”* (Mr Su Ping, personal communication, 13 September 2017), and “*scholastic independence*” (Mr Gao, 11 September 2017).

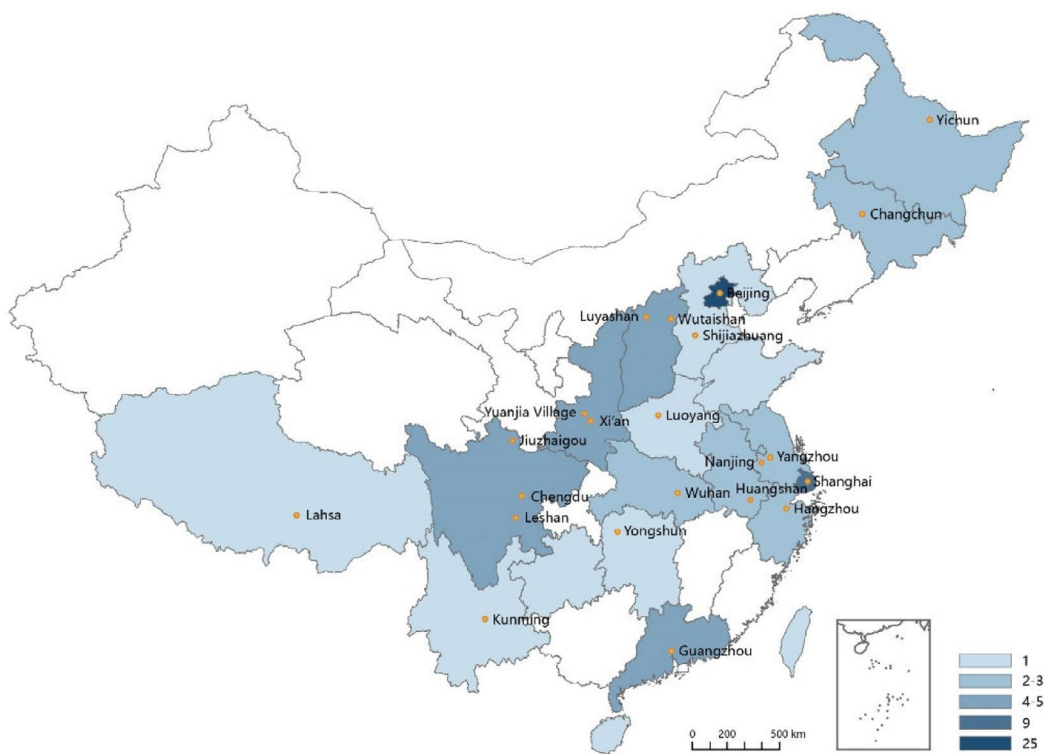


Figure 2. Distribution of destination-based research. (Source: Authors).

The second author likens Tiger Wu as the “rock star” of Chinese tourism and recalls doing a key-note speech in Kunming just after Tiger and before the start of the China International Tourism Mart:

Tiger delivered his speech and there were parts of it when many in the audience laughed. I didn't at that time completely understand what was being said, but he was cracking some good jokes. I had worked very hard at preparing a good presentation on consumer trends, but nobody even broke a smile when I used humor. At the end of our speeches, Tiger was mobbed by people as I stood by and watched. This is tourism fandom in China, I thought, and Tiger Wu rocks.

A mentor

For many of his students, Tiger is not only a world-leading researcher but also a great teacher, mentor, and “easy-going friend with whom you can share anything” (Ms Xiaolan Yang, personal communication on 20 September 2017). The first author recalls taking Tiger's subject on Regional Tourism Planning during her junior year at Peking University:

Tiger is a very innovative and inspiring professor. He was actually the first one in our department to introduce the “concept” of group project and encouraged undergraduate students to do research. In his class, we had to work in groups to examine a tourism-related phenomenon, collect and analyze data, and report our findings to the class. This approach intrigued our interest in tourism and tourism research. Now three (out of 23) of my classmates are tourism researchers.

Almost all his students have a common memory of going to Karaoke with him, liking each other's posts on social media, and being corrected by him via the most “in” instant messenger. As Dr Xiaoting Huang (his former Ph.D. student) recalls that “I remember vividly how Tiger panned me on MSN because of the inappropriate use of punctuation” (personal communication, 27 September 2017).

As a professor at Peking University, he has supervised 36 Doctoral students, 76 Master's students, and countless undergraduate honour theses. He has collaborated with four Postdoctoral Fellows and 38 Visiting Scholars and serves as a Visiting Professor at top-tier universities including Shaanxi Normal University, Harbin Institute of Technology,

Huaqiao University, and his Alma Mater, East China Normal University.

Tiger's students are always impressed by his diligence, persistence, and passion for what he is doing.

Mr Ping Su, Tiger's former Master's student, says:

Tiger's attitude to work has had a great influence on my career development. The most important thing I learned from him is to be passionate about what you are doing, devote wholeheartedly to it, and always strive for excellence.

Dr Lina Zhong, Tiger's Doctoral student and Associate Professor at Beijing International Studies University, adds:

We always call Tiger "iron man". It seems to us that he doesn't need to sleep. I remember once we traveled to Sinkiang for a very intensive field visit. We worked until 1 am almost every night and got up early in the morning. The whole team rested only for five or six hours per day for more than 10 days. Everybody in the team felt exhausted, except Tiger. One day we arrived in an area that is rich in fruits, our local collaborator recommended us to visit a place that produces a special type of fruit. It sounded appealing but we were scared off by the fact that we had to get up at 6am in the next morning. Then Tiger visited the place alone with our local collaborator and came back from the visit sharing with us the potential of that place, energetically and excitedly. He even brought some fresh fruit back for us. It tasted awesome but we all felt a little shamed. On our way back to Beijing, he fell into a deep sleep on the plane. I realized that he is not tireless, he is just more persistent in working hard to achieve his goal than anyone else. We always respect him for his modesty and continuous learning. As the old Chinese saying goes, it is not difficult to teach others with excellent professional knowledge, but it is difficult to teach others how to be a man with his profound knowledge and noble personality. As a teacher, Tiger set a good example for me and he is always my role model.

Tiger is an inspiring mentor. He respects students' research interests and provides endless support even after they graduate. Mr Tao Xue, Tiger's former Master's student, explains:

I had a difficult time to decide the topic for my Master's thesis. Since I came from a landscape architecture background, I

couldn't propose any real tourism problem, and I was afraid that the committee will not let me pass. Then Tiger told me, there is no bad research, any research that contribute to the knowledge advancement is meaningful. He encouraged me to develop the research problem from my academic background and my thesis was not only praised by the committee but also published on Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering.

A sign of a good mentor is when mentees become research colleagues and time and time again this has happened with Tiger's graduate students and others that he has advised. However, Tiger's influence has spread much further than China as his research publications and association work has built an international network of colleagues.

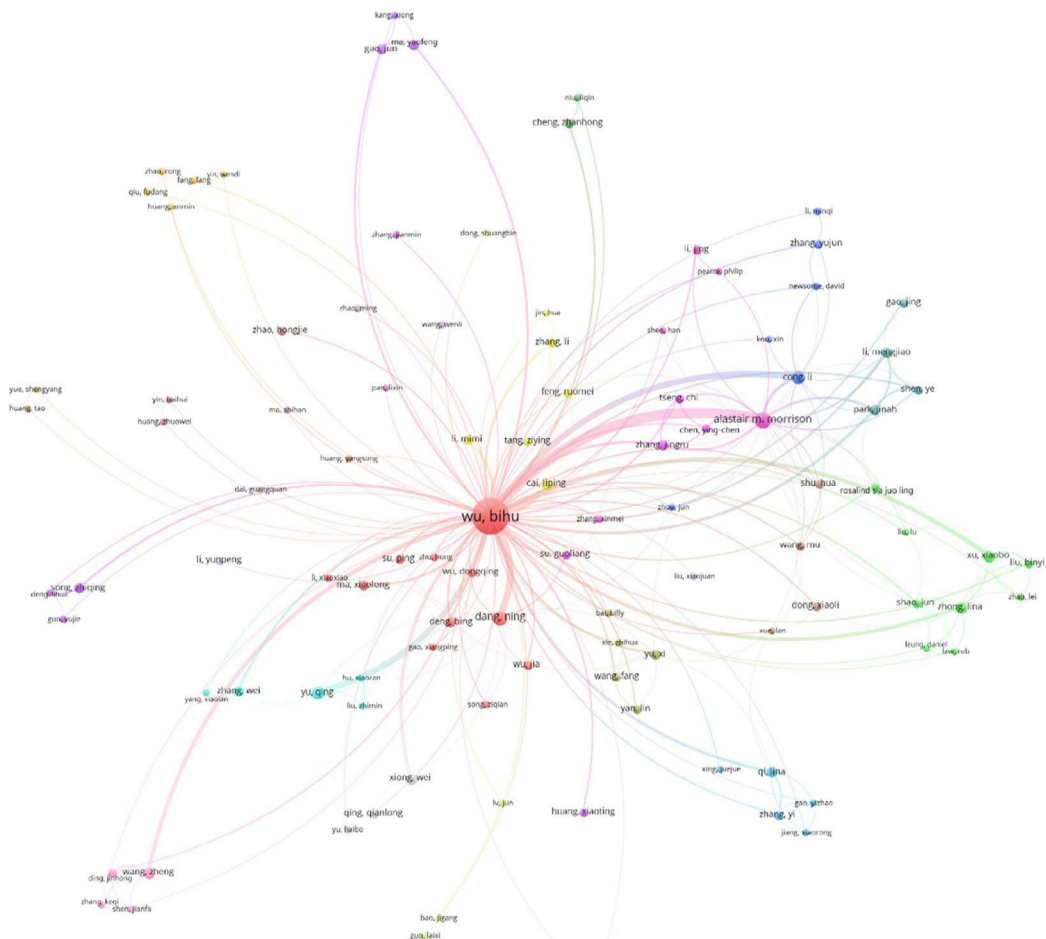
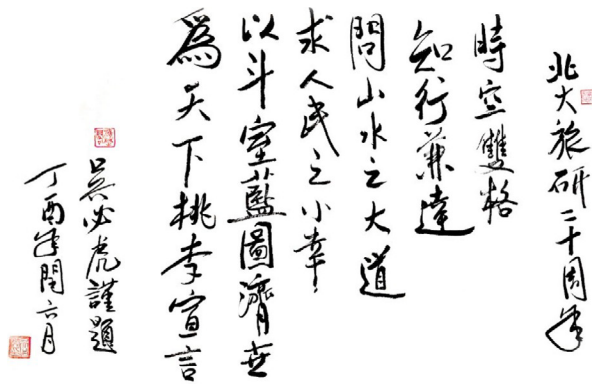


Figure 3. Co-authorship network of Bihu Wu.



Time evolves along with space,
 Knowledge in action corroborates.
 Mountains and waters uphold the truth,
 To which the wellbeing of people subdues.
 Mapping and preaching are dual a goal,
 Regardless of what's global and what local.

Figure 4. Calligraphic expression of his work by Bihu Wu.

A valued colleague

A final perspective on Wu is from the second author and based on comments contributed by several mutual colleagues. Tiger's publishing history is a testimony to his great ability to collaborate with other scholars, in China and around the globe (Figure 3). All those who know him characterize Tiger as affable, witty, energetic, and tireless. On the latter point, the second author witnessed Tiger climbing the 75-metre, Dave Evans Bicentennial Tree in Western Australia, and was amazed by his bravery. Others will remember Tiger as a shutterbug, taking thousands of photos each day. The second author has the following to say about Tiger as a colleague, and not just as a tree-climber and cameraman:

I first met Tiger in 2000 when we invited him as a Visiting Scholar to Purdue University. He impressed me right from the start with his quick wit and knowledge of tourism. He is one of a handful of Chinese tourism scholars of his generation to have made an impact and engaged internationally. Additionally, Tiger is one of

only two Chinese scholars who are Fellows in the International Academy for the Study of Tourism (IAST).

Conclusion

2017 is a remarkable year for Tiger. On 15 July 2017, the International Center for Recreation and Tourism Research at Peking University celebrated its twentieth anniversary with over 100 iCRTR alumni and nearly 200 attendees from academia and industry. For the ceremony, Tiger shared a poem in calligraphy as shown in Figure 4. This is how he positions himself and practices, as a scholar and a mentor.

And so, readers now know more about the Tourism Ironman of China, Bihu “Tiger” Wu. It is quite a story of how a boy from rural Jiangsu has become a famous professor at China’s top university in Beijing. While it will be hard for anyone to emulate this success, it is surely inspirational to young Chinese scholars who wish to make a mark on the world.

Acknowledgements

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