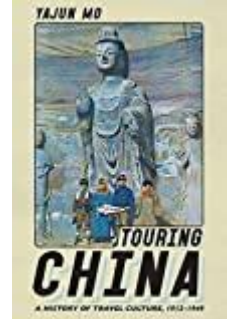


**Yajun Mo.** *Touring China: A History of Travel Culture, 1912–1949.* Histories and Cultures of Tourism Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. 318 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-5017-6104-1.



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**Published on** H-Environment (August, 2022)

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Mo Yajun opens *Touring China* with a description of a two-page spread titled “Meili de Zhonghua” (Beautiful China) published in October 1934 by the photojournalism magazine *Dazhong huabao* (Mass pictorial). The image featured a map of China with the space inside each province’s boundaries filled with black-and-white photographs of their most recognizable travel destinations. The borders of Yunnan Province in southwestern China contained the “geological wonder of its Stone Forests,” while photos of scenic environments also represented several other provinces (p. 1). As the photo spread illustrates, in Mo’s words, “traveling to and witnessing the diverse natural landscapes, historical sites, and local peoples throughout China not only made different parts of the country legible but also rendered ‘the nation as a whole’ (*quanguo*) imaginable” (p. 2).

Mo has written this extensively researched and highly readable history of the tourism industry and travel writing in China during the Republican period (1912-49) primarily for readers interested in cultures of tourism and historians of

modern China. Yet representations of China’s natural landscapes, like the photo spread analyzed at the beginning of the book, appear throughout Mo’s skillfully crafted narrative. Hence, even if they are not the primary intended audience, environmental historians can benefit from *Touring China* as well.

During the first half of the twentieth century, railroad and steamship transportation expanded in China’s coastal regions, spurring the growth of tourism. Between 1927 and 1937, the decade in which the Chinese Nationalist government had its capital in Nanjing, tourism expanded along modern transport networks from long-popular tourist destinations to historic sites and natural landmarks previously inaccessible to urban China’s burgeoning middle class. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the China Travel Service (CTS), which spearheaded development of China’s modern travel industry, commodified environments by offering special tours of destinations in eastern China renowned for their beautiful natural scenery.[1] Mo recognizes that literati travelers

had written about these landscapes and their natural beauty for centuries. But the book does not systematically compare earlier literary representations of these environments with modern Chinese travel writings. Analysis of early twentieth-century travel accounts alongside descriptions of culturally significant landscapes from imperial times will allow environmental historians to examine the place of shifting conceptions of nature in Chinese modernity.

In response to mounting Japanese imperialist pressures in northeastern China (Manchuria) during the 1920s, the multiethnic borderlands in China's Northwest attracted the interest of scientific explorers, journalists, and other urban travelers. Sino-foreign joint expeditions, such as the scientific mission to Xinjiang led by the Swedish geographer Sven Hedin on behalf of Lufthansa German Airlines from 1927 to 1935, surveyed and documented the region's environment. In addition to setting up temporary meteorological stations to collect atmospheric data for Lufthansa, Hedin and his team of Chinese and European scientists and technicians conducted topographical, geological, paleontological, and archaeological surveys, while also collecting ethnological and ethnographical information about Xinjiang's local peoples. Xu Xusheng (also known as Xu Bingchang), a historian from Peking University who served as field director for the mission in 1927-28, "consciously maintained a 'scientific' style in his travel journal," meticulously recording data on the group's altitude and high and low temperatures, as well as Xinjiang's ore deposits and other resources (p. 103).

As Mo relates, Xu Xusheng agreed with Hedin that educating Xinjiang's indigenous population about modern scientific disciplines like meteorology, botany, and zoology "would help solve many practical problems in Xinjiang, such as road construction, forest cultivation, taming and utilizing rivers, and ore extraction." Yet "racial difference" (*renzhong fenqi*) between Xinjiang's Uyghur popu-

lation and Han Chinese, Xu lamented, "made it impossible for the Muslims to be assimilated by the Han" (p. 113). Xu's ideas, Mo observes, were thus "altogether not that different from the Western and Japanese colonizers' approaches in their colonies: building authority in the name of science and modernity" (p. 114).

The Japanese military invasion of Manchuria in 1931 inspired an even wider array of Chinese travelers to, as the slogan of the time put it, "Head to the Northwest" (*dao Xibei qu*). The Ping-Sui Railway, which linked Beijing (known as Beiping at the time) with Baotou in Inner Mongolia, launched a series of publications in 1934 for tourists and general readers. These texts described the Northwest's environments and encouraged Han Chinese to profitably exploit them. The author Bing Xin (pen name of Xie Wanying) drove home the importance of harnessing the resources of the Northwest as a means of strengthening China's national defense against further Japanese incursions when she wrote: "with the loss of the Northeast [Manchuria], animal husbandry and land cultivation in the Northwest have become a source of wealth for the whole country. But we lack any understanding of the land, products, commerce, and other conditions of the Northwest. The Ping-Sui line is the gateway for people to go to the Northwest and for the products in the Northwest to get out" (p. 120). Although one doubts if run-of-the-mill Chinese tourists visited them, writers like Bing reported on sites of production like modern coal mines, representing these "attractions" as examples of modernization and state building.

The Ping-Sui Railway materials also included historian Gu Jiegang's study of a locally revered figure named Wang Tongchun, "a Han militiaman and land merchant who was successful in 'reclaiming' agricultural lands in the region of the Great Bend of the Yellow River in the late Qing period" (p. 119). As Mo explains, Gu's account called on his compatriots to emulate this "national hero" (*minzu yingxiong*) from an earlier episode

of Han Chinese “development” of the Northwest (pp. 119-20). Other authors echoed Gu’s praise of Wang’s efforts to expand Han settlements in Inner Mongolia by arguing for “Han migration and land reclamation as an ultimate solution to ethnic tensions in the region” (p. 123). For Chinese travel writers, large-scale migration, environmental exploitation, and forced assimilation were the “ultimate solution.” Like Xu Xusheng before them, these authors aspired to deploy science and industrial capitalism to integrate the Northwest, which they cast as “a distant, empty land with savage indigenous peoples,” into the nation-state (p. 114). Mo observes that this discourse of Chinese settler-colonialism invites comparisons with European frontier travelers’ descriptions of the environments and indigenous societies of North America but does not pursue this line of inquiry. Other historians would do well to take it further.

Prior to the outbreak of full-scale military hostilities between China and Japan in 1937, even though the scenic travel destinations in southwestern China did not receive as many tourists as those in coastal provinces, books and magazines popularized iconic landscapes in the Southwest, such as the Three Gorges of the Upper Yangzi River, the sacred Buddhist site of Mount Emei, Guilin’s dramatic landscape of karst hills, and the scenic spots around Kunming. Literati visitors had canonized these landscapes in poetry and prose for centuries, but during the 1920s and 1930s photographs reproduced in print-capitalist publications had “helped popularize these iconic sights while having them function as shorthand for a province or even the entire Southwest” (p. 139). Representing natural landscapes was a way of representing the region and incorporating it into the spatial imaginary of the Chinese nation.

Before war broke out in 1937, average tourists from eastern China did not have the means to reach the famous natural attractions of the Southwest and largely consumed them via travelogues and photographs in popular magazines. When

hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees fled to the Southwest with the Nationalist government, which made the city of Chongqing in Sichuan Province its wartime capital, travelers could visit famous sites, like the Three Gorges and Guilin, for the first time. As intellectuals, journalists, and other literate members of the urban middle class fled to the Nationalist-controlled Southwest, they brought modern travel culture with them. The Japanese occupation ended CTS’s operations in eastern China, but during wartime CTS expanded into the tourism market of the Southwest. The services of CTS, along with wartime infrastructural improvements, made the iconic landscapes of the Southwest accessible to large numbers of travelers for the first time.

Japan’s defeat in 1945 and the collapse of its empire resulted in the retrocession of Taiwan, which had been a colony of Japan since 1895, to the Republic of China. As a result, Taiwan entered the orbit of Chinese domestic travel and tourism. The recovery of Taiwan gave visitors from the Chinese mainland the opportunity to observe and comment on the island’s natural landscape and rich natural resources. Travel writers published accounts of the island’s most popular tourist sites, which included Sun-Moon Lake (in Chinese Riyue tan, in Japanese Jitsugetsu tan) and Mount Ari (in Chinese Ali shan, in Japanese Ari san). The writer Huang Qing described forestry management, logging, and sawmill operations that the Japanese had set up at Mount Ari, arguing that the model of Taiwan’s forestry management could be transplanted to South China’s Hainan Island. Sun-Moon Lake, which consists of two conjoined lakes surrounded by tree-covered mountain ridges, likewise “captured the imagination of mainland tourists” with its majestic scenery and the “manmade beauty” of its hydroelectric plant. As Mo explains, “Recognized as an engineering marvel, the hydraulic plant was put on the list of must-see sites in Taiwan, even though it was built by the Japanese” (p. 201). For postwar Chinese travel writers, the Japanese colonial development of Taiwan

presented a powerful vision of the industrial modern that they aspired to emulate elsewhere in China.

As already indicated, *Touring China* does not fully interrogate these environmental themes and they are not the book's primary concern. Nevertheless, Mo has done environmental historians of China a great service by identifying several potentially fruitful new topics: tourism and the commodification of nature, representations of the environment in premodern and modern travel writing, the relationship between settler-colonialism and travelers' descriptions of the peoples and environments of the Northwest, wartime travel writing and changing understandings of the scenic

landscapes of the Southwest, and postwar accounts of Japan's colonial transformation of Taiwan's environment as Chinese visions of industrial modernity. Environmental historians in general can compare Mo's informative and richly documented study of tourism and travel culture in modern China with travel accounts of natural landscapes in other parts of the world.

Note

[1]. These sites included the Haining tidal bore, Fuchun River, and Xudoushan Mountain (birthplace of Chiang Kai-shek) in Zhejiang Province and Huangshan Mountain in Anhui Province.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment>

**Citation:** Micah S. Muscolino. Review of Mo, Yajun. *Touring China: A History of Travel Culture, 1912–1949*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. August, 2022.

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