



# **Boundless Big Beauty: Boundary Studies on the National Parks in China**

Lianyong Wang



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# **Boundless Big Beauty:**

## **Boundary Studies on the National Parks**

### **in China**

**Lianyong Wang**

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## ***Foreword by Alastair M. Morrison***

**October 1, 2015.  
Shanghai, China**

With this book and the research upon which it is based, Dr. Lianyong Wang makes an extremely valuable and timely contribution to the literature on national parks in China. John Muir, the founder of the system of national parks in the USA and a fellow Scot, once said the following:

*“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity”.*

— John Muir, *Our National Parks*

Although Muir’s words addressed people on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, they are equally meaningful for the over-stressed citizens of an increasingly urbanized China. Muir’s crowning achievement of the establishment of Yosemite National Park and the other parks that followed set a marker for all other countries to follow and China is no exception. However China is different in many ways from the USA and requires a national park system with its own distinctive characteristics.

The author points out that China’s national park system was created some 30 years ago but surprisingly their boundaries do not appear on any official maps. Although strange in itself, this “boundless” nature of China’s national parks causes huge problems for their management and the achievement of their mission and purposes. Can you imagine Yellowstone National Park not having an indelible boundary line? There would be endless and chaotic “border disputes” and disruptive battles between conservation and development. Local residents would be pitted against tourists and environmentalists, and there eventually would be no winners.

Dr. Wang in his book describes the establishment and agreement on national park boundaries as a “work in progress” in China with many agencies and other stakeholders competing to influence the process. There are conflicts between agencies of national, provincial, and local governments, each with claims on parts of the land in question. There are

tensions caused by competition between the stakeholders from different aspects of society including agriculture, mining, forestry, tourism, industry, and local residents with respect to land usage.

The research for this book is detailed and provides much useful information on the classification and numbers of parks in the system at present. There are many valuable statistics of the area dimensions of parks along with interesting case studies of specific parks. Undoubtedly the book will become an essential reference source for anyone with an interest in China's national parks in the years to come. Much care and painstaking research has gone into the preparation of this book and the readers should greatly appreciate the value of this work.

The author recommends a VOICE (Visitor Oriented Interpretation for Conservation Enhancement) for China's national park system and this is a very solid suggestion. Given the unique situation of the nation, the author also proposes a unique guiding model in the "3HOLD system", which stands for Health, Harmony, and Happiness Oriented Land Development.

Dr. Wang has done a masterful job in this book of weaving the principles of natural area conservation and national parks with the realities of modern-day China. He clearly articulates the weaknesses of China's existing national park system but sympathetically portrays the underlying reasons based upon his in-depth research. As a foreigner, it seems that China's existing system is a tangled web of government policies and authorities all with some say over how parks are administered.

Henry David Thoreau is attributed with saying "*in wilderness is the preservation of the world*" and surely the world's national parks are one of the key strategies for ensuring that wilderness survives the ravages of rapid development and urbanization. John Muir founded the Sierra Club in the USA in 1892 and the Club's centerpiece program, *Our Wild America*, is based on the following principle:

*"In order to leave a robust wild legacy for our children, we must significantly increase the amount of public lands and waters that are permanently protected as national monuments and wilderness"* (Sierra Club, 2015, <http://content.sierraclub.org/ourwildamerica/>).

China's rapid economic development is a new economic wonder of the world and it has vastly improved the livelihoods of many Chinese citizens. However its costs are also very evident in the ever-increasing urban sprawl and the pollution that chokes many environments. China's national parks represent a priceless "green oasis" for millions to enjoy, marvel at the

wilderness, and rediscover themselves in natural settings.

As an expert in tourism development and marketing, I highly treasure the value and personal experiences that I have had in the national parks of Australia, Canada, UK, USA, and other countries around the world. These national parks are the guardians of nature and wilderness, and offer unparalleled scenic beauty and wonderful recreational opportunities. They are truly boundless in their beauty and contribution to the sustainability of our world as we know it. The author of this book is to be congratulated for his work which above all serves to raise the awareness of key issues in China with national parks and their demarcation.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority in my own country, Scotland, has a vision that seems to fit well with the main conclusions of this book: *“Our vision is that land management continues to actively shape the special landscapes, habitats and wildlife as well as providing jobs and economic benefits to communities. This means balancing sometimes competing objectives, adapting skills to meet new challenges and opportunities and collaborating across land ownership boundaries to deliver bigger and better habitats and stronger more resilient businesses”* (Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2015, <http://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/land-management/>).

Congratulations to the author, Dr. Lianyong Wang, on producing such a well-documented and meaningful text.

Alastair M. Morrison, Ph.D.

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CEO, Belle Tourism International Consulting, Shanghai, China

## ***Foreword by Steven J. Hollenhorst***

**October 1, 2015.**

**Bellingham, Washington State, USA**

There are now more than 200,000 protected areas on planet earth, located on land and the sea and in every country. These protected areas share two common goals, to conserve our natural and cultural heritage and to provide these benefits for the good of society. Protected areas are also place where people to connect with nature for inspiration, education, wellbeing and recreation. While they are essential to the protection of our planet's biodiversity, they also support essential ecosystem services and human livelihoods. More than 12% of the earth's surface is in protected area status, up from 1% just 50 years ago.

Protected area systems vary greatly from nation to nation, reflecting the unique actors, political processes, values, and purposes of those nations. Yet they share important features, regardless of their origins and purposes. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines the governance and management regimes at the heart of every protected area as a 'clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.'

National parks are the cornerstones of the protected area systems in most countries, including China. Like in most other countries, the national park concept is relatively new in China, with the first national parks being established a mere thirty years ago. We know from worldwide experience that development of a coherent and effective system of national park administration takes time, it takes experimentation, and it takes wisdom that builds over many decades. It is through this experience that national park systems are organized and placed on a firm foundation of policy, principle, and tradition. We must remember that the concept of national parks did not even exist until 1872 with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in the U.S.A. It took another four decades for a national park system to be created in 1916 to conserve and protect the increasing number of national parks established by the U.S. Congress. Today the U.S. national park system includes 408 national parks, monuments, historic sites, battlefields, trails, seashores, wild and scenic rivers, and other protected areas totaling over

341,279 km<sup>2</sup>. These areas are managed uniformly and cohesively by a single agency, the National Park Service, as directed by a body of laws and administrative policies. The system is unified by a common mission, along with uniform management systems, infrastructure design standards, interpretation and education resources, media and communications, and personnel practices.

But it took nearly 150 years to get to this point, and the U.S. is much more the exception than the rule because of its early start. In most countries, like China, national park management and policy is still in the early, and exciting, formative years of development. This process will be speeded by the innovation and creativity of park managers, conservationists, policy makers, and academics working collaboratively to build the system's capacity.

This book is one such contribution to developing the capacity among conservation professionals for improved planning, management and governance of China's national park systems. It begins with recognizing the importance of clearly defined and delineated national park boundaries. But the current lack of such boundaries is exemplary of the need in other important areas of national park administrative capacity, such as law enforcement, environmental education and interpretation, concessions management, infrastructure development, and communications and marketing.

A key feature of this book is to promote better governance of China's national park system and thereby to promote more effective management that will achieve both conservation and social goals. Achieving more cohesive, effective, and equitable governance requires the contribution of all institutions and individuals involved. This book provides an accessible and valuable resource to underpin future capacity development efforts. At its heart, this book describes the current state of the quickly evolving national park system in China. From that starting place, policy formation, management capacity, and the establishment of unifying traditions can be developed that eventually lead to governance and management of China's most invaluable ecological and cultural assets.

Steven J. Hollenhorst, Ph.D.

Professor and Dean

Huxley College of the Environment

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## ***Foreword by the author***

**October 1, 2015.**

**Beibei, Chongqing, China**

The book was written observing the fundamental principle of human-land relationship in order to decipher a unique China phenomenon-National Park of China's boundaries can hardly be found in maps in comparison to clear park boundary marks in other nations.

On the basis of collecting and sorting pertinent materials in the master plans of national parks in China systematically, using the inspirational ideas of single large or several small (SLOSS) debate in biogeography, and incorporating the traditional Chinese philosophy of Clustering and Partitioning Concept (CPC), the author conducted a detailed classification over the 197 Chinese national parks, whose planned boundaries were graphically redrawn and represented, individually and specifically. The research shows that 76 national parks are classified as several-small-protected-area parks (SSPA parks), including 40 Several Stars Partitioning Boundary parks (SSPB parks). Undoubtedly, the complicated and separated boundary structure is neither good for presenting and disseminating the map related information, nor beneficial for a uniform administration of landscape resources.

Accordingly, the author continues his research to analyze the boundary interactions between national parks and their situated administrative divisions. The result shows that 68 of the 208 national parks are trans-border parks, including 2 trans-provincial-border parks, 13 trans-prefectural-border parks, and 53 trans-county-border parks. The hard-core administrative divisions set an outside bounding mechanism over the soft boundary growth of national parks. This leads to a difficult boundary growth of trans-border parks which encounter a thorny trouble in the practical management of boundary uncertainty and instability.

The supportive arguments of uncertainty, instability and dynamic evolution of park boundaries are consequently found through the longitudinal studies into the past 12 years of the official statistics on park area data. Within the whole system, 124 of the 208 national parks did not submit a complete data set. Among the remaining 84 parks, 59 parks did not present an insistent value of area data over years. The undulating change of area data proves that the legal

effectiveness of the planned park boundaries is not adequately respected and maintained. Xishuangbanna and Three Parallel Rivers national parks present a surprising value difference over 60 times and 120 times respectively, between the planned park area data and the statistical park area data submitted by the local government agencies.

Unquestionably, the dynamic boundary evolution proved by the undulating area data submission has been necessarily driven by some human-induced, social factors. A comparative research is therefore conducted in the book to analyze the population pressure over the boundaries of the national parks. The research indicates that the urbanized land uses pose a threat to encroach the park boundaries in urban landscaped regions; while the synchronous population and household growth brings about certain pressure upon the park boundaries in rural and pastoral landscaped regions. As for the tourist population, the comparison of annual visitation and environmental pressure index of the most visited national parks are conducted between China and USA; this vividly accounts for the huge population pressure upon park boundaries in China. Within each year from 2007 to 2010, the hosted visitors in Taihu Lake National Park of China actually outnumbered the subtotal visitation of the top ten national parks in USA. In either 2009 or 2010, a visitation in any of the top ten parks in China truly outnumbered the US top one—the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The sharp difference results in the comparison of tourist population pressure index between these two nations which demonstrates a more forcible and valuable argument for environmental education.

It is the unique national situation of large tourist population with limited recreational lands that drove the Chinese government and its subordinate ministries gradually inaugurated other national level park programs for the purpose of making a reasonable response to mitigate the conflicts. Therefore, the author continues to explore into the collective boundary bounding mechanism over the growth and maintenance of the national park boundaries. The research argues that the national situation of large population with limited land resources in general influences the spatial distribution of the diversified parks; as a result, the overlapped park boundaries in a single locality are pervasively to be found in the country. 44 of the 208 national parks share boundaries with national nature reserves in the same region; 104 national parks share boundaries with national forest parks in the same region; and 66 national parks share boundaries with national geoparks in the same region. The multi-park boundary overlapping impairs the professionalism of national park boundaries, leading to an increase of boundary-induced conflicts in the domain of public administration. Not surprisingly, the normal growth of national park boundaries is suffocated by the multi-park collective boundary bounding mechanism.

The researches throughout the book disclose a fact that the planned boundaries of national

parks in China are developing in the early phase, being controlled by a multitude of natural and social factors, and seeing a pervasive phenomenon of boundary instability around the country. In the end, the author states that the problem of uncertainty and instability can only be resolved eventually by the legal creation of a unified and normalized Chinese National Park System in which professional management agencies and substantial financial supports are placed.

In order to make a difference to change the awkward situation in which National Park of China's boundary marks cannot be seen in the maps, the author finally completed the editing of a map - Current Boundaries and Spatial Distribution of National Parks in China when he consummated his writing of this book.

Due to the limited time, energy and disposable research funding, this book can only be regarded as the result of an exploratory study on the complicated national park boundary issues in China. More detailed information and conclusion of park boundary dynamics can only be gradually disclosed in longer term future based on the continued field work in the real park sites across China.

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The publication of the English version is a gift devoted to the People's Republic of China on the occasion of its 66th birthday. On this special occasion, it is my hope the book will contribute to the "eco-civilization construction" and "Beautiful China Building" endeavors as creative national policies that will lead to essential reforms in the national park management regime during the Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang Administration.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my entire family for their support of my work on national park studies. They are the greatest source of joy in my life.

Wang Lianying

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