

## **Contested Landscape:**

### **How Migrated Intellectuals Reinvented Yunnan During World War II?**

During the Second World War, Yunnan, a historically remote and ethnically diverse province in Southwest China, became a contested landscape where migrated Chinese intellectuals and Western explorers intersected, creating new knowledge, identities, and power dynamics. This study examines how the migration of Chinese intellectuals to Yunnan during the war, driven by the central government's efforts to consolidate control and mobilize resources, led to the reinvention of Yunnan's cultural and physical landscapes. Focusing on the interactions between migrated intellectuals, Western explorers, and Indigenous communities, this research explores the tensions and collaborations that emerged in this unique historical context.

The study centers on some key figures. For example, Li Lincan 李霖灿, a patriotic artist and researcher of Naxi Dongba culture 东巴文化, and Qin Renchang 秦仁昌, a botanist and forest administrator. Both migrated to Yunnan during the war and engaged in the reinterpretation of Yunnan's landscapes, albeit in different ways. Li Lincan, inspired by the work of Austrian-American explorer Joseph Rock, sought to create a sinicized representation of Yunnan's natural and cultural landscapes, particularly through his depictions of the Yulong Snow Mountain. His work reflected a desire to surpass Western interpretations and assert Chinese cultural authority. Qin Renchang, on the other hand, viewed Yunnan's landscapes as physical and economic resources, collaborating with Western botanists, such as Rock, while also implementing the central government's policies to nationalize forests and exploit natural resources.

The research situates these figures within the broader framework of the "contact zone," a space where diverse groups—Tibetan monks, local shamans, Kuomintang officials, and foreign explorers—interacted under conditions of inequality and conflict. By analyzing the contested landscapes of Yunnan, this study reveals how migrated intellectuals navigated the complexities of cultural representation, resource exploitation, and environmental protection. It also highlights the agency of Indigenous communities, who both facilitated and resisted these reinventions culturally and physically.

This research challenges the binary narratives of East-West encounters and instead emphasizes the multifaceted interactions within China and Yunnan as a site of transculturation. Moreover, it would like to dialogue with James Scott's concept of Zomia.