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Conservation of Asian mountain ecosystems is not new. Protected areas and restrictions for hunting and forest overexploitation were set in Sri Lanka in the 3rd century, in China and Japan in the 6th and 7th centuries, and in Mongolia in the 13th century. Pilgrimage has been a form of tourism for centuries, often targeted at mountains (holy peaks, hidden valleys, sacred groves). Since the end of World War II and more intensively since the 1990s, the globalizing influence of western culture and policies, together with the growing wealth, rapid urbanization, and shifting demography of the large share of world population concentrated in this area, resulted in an explosion of protected areas (14% of terrestrial Asia by 2014) and in massive nature-based tourism (NBT). Climate change and, more recently, the Covid-19 outbreak add complexity to the scenario. Historically, research on NBT has been limited mostly to western and English-speaking countries. Hence Asia, with its rapid and heterogeneous patterns of change, provides an excellent opportunity to expand the analysis to a more diverse world in the context of globalization.

The volume is organized in 5 sections. The first one defines the basic questions as well as key concepts referenced later (NBT, IUCN categories, Aichi targets). Country-based analyses (with 1 detailed protected area case study each) are organized into 3 geographically defined subsections: Northeast (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan), Southeast (Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar), and South (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka) Asia. A final fifth section summarizes the main findings and conclusions.

By excluding North Korea and Mongolia, the section on Northeast Asia represents the continent's most prosperous economies, where urban areas are expanding (as well as forests) and where NBT involves millions of visitors and billions of dollars. Japan, with its iconic Mount Fuji, was the earliest Asian country to establish a System of National Parks (1931), a model the Japanese "exported" early to Taiwan (1937). In both countries NBT has not grown during recent years, a distinctive pattern compared to the rest of the continent. China is the paramount example of rapidly expanding NBT resulting from recent economic growth and a wealthy urban class demanding recreation, challenging outdoor activities, and nature-rich landscapes. The impressive figures of 1.6 billion annual visits, 500,000 employments, and 20 million indirect beneficiaries of NBT in the 3500 "forest parks" illustrate the scale of the process. China's influence reaches beyond its national borders: it is a major source of tourism in South Korea, and its ban on travel to Taiwan resulted in a major drop of tourism there. Visitor congestion is an emerging feature in the region, stimulating development of modern management tools—for example, lottery permit systems in Taiwan, temporally changing pricing based on carrying capacity in Huangshan, mainland China, and persuasive communication strategies to divert mass tourism to less crowded destinations in South Korea.

The 5 countries analyzed in Southeast Asia exemplify the rather typical situation of tropical developing countries in which conservation of megabiodiversity ecosystems conflicts with deforestation, logging, and poaching, which is largely attributed to a marginalized rural population that differs from tourists culturally and economically. Sri Lanka, included in the section on South Asia, also rather fits the pattern of Southeast Asia. Mountain tourism targets relatively low-elevation (<3500 masl) iconic volcanos or peaks with high accessibility (eg Bromo in Java, Ramelau in Timor, Apo in the Philippines, Natma Taung in Myanmar, Fansipan in Vietnam, and the Knuckles in Sri Lanka). NBT is orders of magnitude smaller than in Northeast Asia and in many cases limited or jeopardized by sociopolitical unrest. But it is growing, along with emerging economic opportunities and conflicts with traditional land uses and cultures. Comparatively weak government institutions try to mediate these conflicts, but limited human, financial, and administrative resources remain a major problem.

The Himalayas (here represented by Nepal and India) present a particular type of NBT involving hundreds of thousands of mostly foreign hikers and climbers of the highest peaks (14 of 8000 m or higher). Sagarmatha National Park (Mt Everest) has more than 50,000 annual visitors on the Nepalese side alone. In addition (somewhat surprisingly for an outside reader like this reviewer), more than 50 million mostly domestic pilgrims visit the region's mountains, representing more than 80% of its mountain tourism. While tourism is a major economic factor, most of the rural population still makes a living with traditional agriculture and livestock. The tourism boom includes some success stories of participatory conservation (eg the Annapurna conservation area in Nepal) as well as conflicts resulting from growing resentment between local and national beneficiaries of tourism revenues (in the Kangchenjunga area in Sikkim), overcrowding leading to temporal closure of some areas (Hemis National Park in Kashmir), permanent closure due to incompatibility between mountaineering and religious principles (Mt Ganghkar

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Puensum in Bhutan), or "peace parks" such as Taxkorgan on the border of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan.

Some topics are relevant across the different regions, including the role of colonial legacies (government structures, institutionalized conservation, cultural valuation of mountain-based physical activity, marginalization of some local cultures); discrepancies among local, national, and international valuation of nature; and dissonance between traditional pilgrimages and modern, sports-oriented tourism. The book does a fine job in describing and analyzing them in depth and providing detailed information on geographic patterns, trends in tourism, and the different countries' political and institutional organization.

While nature conservation is always a reference and iconic species are the basis of some of the discussed NBT initiatives (for example, snow macaques and giant salamanders in Japan; snow leopards in the Himalayas; and orangutans, rhinos, elephants, and tigers in the south), the analysis of ecology and biodiversity is rather superficial, with little quantitative information on species populations or trends in ecosystem services, and without rigorous backing of concepts like "environmental degradation" and ecological "fragility." The Middle East and post-soviet Asia (ie more than half of the continent) are not considered in the book, nor are countries/regions such as Thailand, Malaysia, Bhutan, Tibet, and Mongolia. This makes the title a little misleading. Geopolitical conflicts and their role in shaping territory and policies are not analyzed in depth.

Despite these limitations, the book's ambitious goals are largely achieved. The concluding section emphasizes that mountains are a shared space of natural, religious, sociocultural, and recreational values. Distinctive geological features have contributed to religious value in local belief, turning many mountains into pilgrimage sites. Many of the peaks that are the basis of NBT also represent the country's highest point and, as such, constitute patriotic symbols. Individual, local, national, and international institutions, values, and economic and cultural principles interact in a complex dynamic, and the analysis presented here provides a rich and updated picture of a large part of Asia that should serve as a key reference for a global analysis of the interaction between nature and people in the mountains of the Anthropocene.

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