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Contribution to the  
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## Hunan Province as a destination for European tourists

This report is based on an 11-days study trip to various tourist spots in Hunan, including on-site investigation and various expert discussions plus additional research through the internet and literature. It is a contribution to a bigger project by the School of Tourism of Sun Yatsen University in Guangzhou. The author is a German professor living in China for many years and teaching at Sun Yatsen University since 2004.

### About destinations and their promotion

A **destination** is a region or a place, which is recognised by a name and associated with certain imaginations, which may inspire people to travel there. This could be a theme park such as Disneyland, a city such as Paris, a country such as China or just a beach in the sun. There is no limit in terms of size to what is a destination, but it is important that people associate certain imaginations with it. The Xicheng or Dongcheng Districts of Beijing for example are not well-known as destinations, but the Forbidden City is, and Yichang as a place is much less known than the Three Gorges. In both cases, the difference lies not in the actual place but in the imaginations associated with names.

There are cases that a province or state is known as a famous destination (California, Tuscany, Hainan), but more often than not the opposite is true. Even for very popular destinations in China such as Guilin/Yangshuo, Xian, Suzhou or the Great Wall, few European visitors could tell the name of the respective provinces, and few are actually interested in this aspect. Those are **administrative units** with little to no relevance to the tourist experience.

It is therefore important to recognise that the promotion of provinces as destinations is derived solely from the needs of tourism planning and administration but not from the needs of the customers. This circumstance makes their promotion a bit more difficult. The customers tend to refer to cities (Hangzhou, Suzhou), mountain ranges (Huangshan, Tianshan), basins (the Red Basin), rivers (Yangtse, Li Jiang) or other famous routes (Silk Road, Grand Canal) as destinations, regardless of their administrative belonging. From the marketing point of view, it would be better to focus promotion efforts on the **imaginations already present** in the customers' minds, but unfortunately it is often seen as impractical for provincial administrations to develop and promote destinations outside their jurisdiction or, the other way round, to neglect certain regions within their jurisdiction.

If not for this reason, it should be considered for Xinjiang for example to promote the Silk Road, for Shandong the Tai Shan and for Ningxia the Hui people before they start attempts to make the provincial names known. The possible next step would then be to link to it as many other destinations in the Province as they can. The resulting network would not cover the whole province equally, and it may even reach beyond the provincial boundaries (e.g. if Jiangsu were to promote the Grand Canal, Jiangxi the Beijing-Kowloon-Railway or Fujian the Hakka culture), but a successful campaign would benefit the tourism development in the province. If this strategy should be chosen for Hunan, it would be crucial to identify an anchor theme or an **anchor destination**.

## Hunan Province - searching for a promotable destination

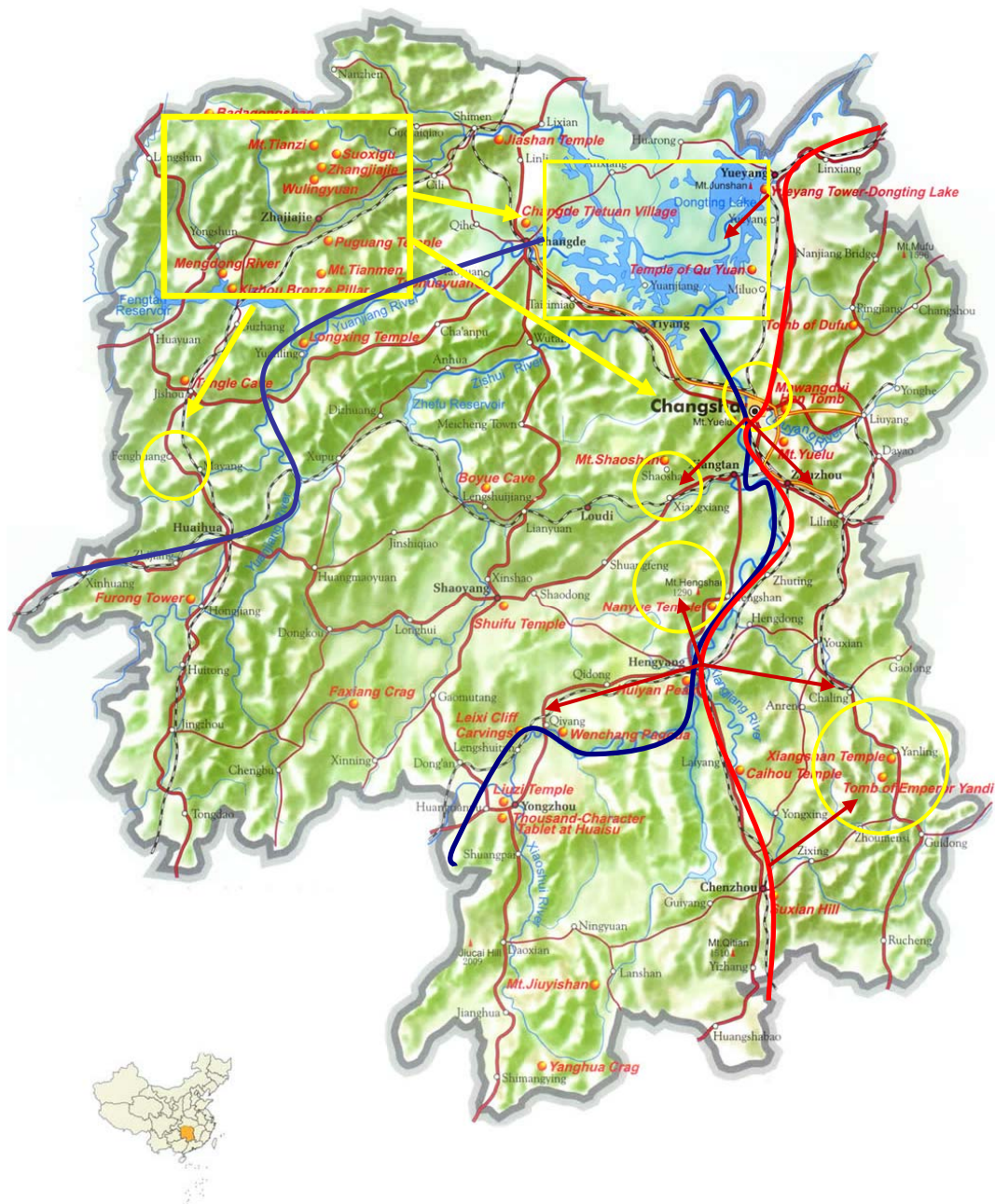
Such a theme or destination should ideally already be well-known among the target group (for our purpose, European travellers), but unfortunately Hunan as a province is equally little known in Europe as its various tourist spots. Some Europeans are aware of Hunan as the home province of Mao Zedong, some more know about the spicy Hunan food, but most relate nothing to the province. Even less known than the province's name is the capital Changsha or in fact any other place in Hunan. The best known destinations for Europeans in Hunan are probably Zhangjiajie, Dongting Lake and Mount Hengshan, but only to a tiny minority of China "experts".

If we recognise that tourists and tour organisers select locations rather than provinces, the **low recognition of places** in Hunan is probably a bigger problem than the low recognition of the province itself. Suitable candidates for an anchor destination are hard to find. If we are looking for a centrally located travel route rather than an individual place, the Xiang River, which has given the province its unofficial second name as "Xiang", would come to mind, or the Jingguang-(Beijing-Wuhan-Guangzhou) Railway. Both have the advantage that they cross the whole eastern part of the province like a backbone, but they are already too far away for daytrips from the western part. In the western part, the Yuanjiang would be a possible candidate for a route.

Both rivers are less spectacular than other rivers in China, but at the end the marketing prospects would depend on the whole product, not just the resource. Successful examples in Europe show that waterways have been developed as boating or cycling routes. Especially cycling routes along rivers have become very popular for family holidays, because there are normally not too many steep sections, and it is easy to follow the way along a river. Both boating and cycling tourism will be mentioned again later.

The Jingguang Railway would have to compete with other rail lines in China, and even along the line, Hunan destinations such as Yueyang, Changsha and Hengyang would have to compete for tourist attention with other stops outside the province. Railway tourism, however, is popular for Europeans, who are used to travel by rail. If there is a good service and a convenient way of booking, many people like to discover foreign countries by rail. It is easier to bridge long distances by rail than by bicycle or boat, but the tourist will see more of the country than by air plane. Rail tourism can therefore be a very attractive choice for first- and second-time visitors to China, who prefer to see many places in one trip. As the connecting route between the two most popular entry points into China, Beijing and Guangdong, the Jingguang Railway has good chances of becoming something like the "Trans-China Railway". It can, however, hardly be developed without co-operation of the national railway administration.

The Xiang River and Jingguang Railway are **travel routes**, which can be marketed as a product or destination. The advantage of routes is that they cover a broader geographical area. Successful examples are the Transsiberian Railway, the Orient Express, the "Silk Road", the "Fairytale Road" in Germany and the Panamericana. Most destinations, however, are not linear in structure but **places** or small regions. The internationally best-known and most attractive in Hunan would be Zhangjiajie (Wulingyuan). This touristic highlight is unfortunately not at all centrally located within Hunan, and thus difficult to connect with many others, but it is probably the destination in the province, which has the most promising marketing potential. If Zhangjiajie could be developed into a real first-class destination for China tours of European travellers, it will become easier to then establish side trips to secondary destinations such as Fenghuang, the Dongting Lake or Shaoshan.



**Map:** Hunan Province and some of its tourist destinations. [Blue: main waterway axes (Xiang and Yuan Rivers), red: main railway axis (Jingguang Railway), yellow: some touristic highlights]

## Hunan – “The Heart of China”

Even though the provincial name is not the most promising to put into the centre of the promotion efforts in Europe, the promotion of Hunan as a whole may still be desired for reasons of administrative convenience and responsibility. In this case, the central location, the landscape and rural environment, the food and the claim of being "typical Chinese" could be attributes to mention. None of them is really exceptional, but they can be used to create positive associations with this province.

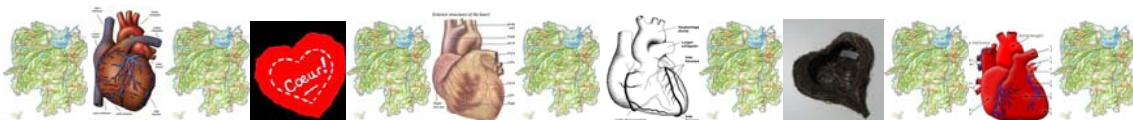
These associations can best be conveyed in promotional campaigns through images and especially through a suitable slogan. The slogan I suggest is: “**Hunan – The Heart of China**”. The word “heart” firstly conveys a warm and positive feeling, secondly it gives us the image that Hunan embodies typical Chinese characteristics and to some extent represents the whole of China, and thirdly it implies centrality - the heart is always in the middle.

These are all three crucial points. A campaign promoting a whole province, which is very diverse, and which may not be taken as a concrete destination by the target audience anyway, must mainly focus on a general image and positive feelings. The symbol of the heart is suitable for this. Secondly, if the heart of China beats in Hunan, this is a place, where people can see the "**real China**". European tourists want to see the outstanding cities (Beijing, Shanghai) and landscapes, they are also interested in the minority areas, but at the end - besides the outstanding and the exotic - they also want to know the typical features of life in China. In this context, they are especially looking for images of traditional rural landscapes, villages and old towns. Hunan does have a strong tradition in agriculture and rural culture, and it has the advantage that relatively much of the rural heritage is still undestroyed. It is therefore in a good position to satisfy this particular demand.

A good position can thirdly also be understood in a geographical sense. If looking for the typical Chinese images, visitors and tourist operators will not want to go much out of their way. Therefore it is especially important to draw tourist to one outstanding anchor location within the province, from which other secondary destinations can be served. On the other hand Hunan's **central location** along one of the country's main north-south axis, the Jingguang Railway, and just between the East and the West of China is a distinct advantage.

Lastly: Would a claim of Hunan being the Heart of China be justified? Where does the heart of China beat? Some may come up with the idea of Beijing, but I would rather see Beijing as the head, the leading city in China. It is outstanding, but not particularly typical for the "real China". It is also by no way near the geographical centre. The heart of China should still be seen as rural. In many ways, the provinces of Hunan and Hubei ideally fulfil these criteria. Additionally, they are related to symbolic figures such as Yendi for the ancient China and Mao Zedong for the new China. Both can also be seen as symbolising the "heart of China" in an emotional and idealistic sense.

The slogan "Hunan - The Heart of China" is easy to remember and can be used in many different ways. It can for example be linked to the spicy Hunan food, and it can – with a bit of fantasy – be associated with the heart-like shape of the provincial territory.



## Tourism resources and possible themes

Hunan is a mountainous province. About 80% of the territory is considered mountains and only about 20% plain. The plain areas are mainly in the north, around Dongting Lake, and along the Xiangjiang Valley. Even the Yuanjiang Valley in the west of the province is relatively narrow and surrounded by mountains, such as the famous Wuling Shan. Other mountain chains frame the province to the east (Luoxiao Shan) and south (Nanling Shan). Both the plains and the many mountainous areas are strongly shaped by agricultural uses. The province is famous for example for its rice and tea culture. Even though the relative importance of agriculture has gone down in recent years, and much of the **natural and rural heritage** has been sacrificed in the course of development, these are still the major tourism resources in the province.

There is no big potential for urban tourism. Changsha, the provincial capital, is basically the only big city with significant urban tourism resources, but these are not outstanding on the national level. It is not realistic to attract any relevant share of European city travellers to Changsha. Besides the capital, there are a number of attractive small towns, the most famous being the "Phoenix City" Fenghuang. They are great tourism resources, but because of their small size people may not visit them for more than a day. This makes them unsuitable as stand-alone destinations. They must be embedded in tours, which connect several such small towns or the towns and the surrounding landscape. It is important that tourism development especially in the west of the province adopts a holistic view instead of focussing just on these towns themselves.

The suggested focus on landscape, rural and small town tourism should not be seen as a consequence of limited urban attractions. It can indeed be even more valuable in view of its **development impact**. Generally speaking, rural tourism revenue benefits mainly the less developed regions, which need the tourism dollars most. Furthermore, holiday tourism, which dominates in rural destinations, brings less disturbances and more revenue than sightseeing tourism. In Europe, for example, the average holiday maker stays significantly longer than the average urban tourist. Rural tourism additionally links well with related products such as food tourism, health tourism, activity-oriented programmes and historic interest tours.





**Food tourism**, featuring both agricultural produce and local cuisine, is increasingly popular. Hunan could build a reputation on its well-known spicy cuisine and on its agricultural specialities - especially tea and rice. Food-oriented tourists have an interest in the production and different species of - for instance - tea, and they demand good restaurants, which serve freshly produced local specialities. **Health tourism** is becoming a big market in Europe with its ageing population, but

it is unlikely that China can any time soon capture a significant section of this market, but **activity-oriented products** will become very popular in China, too. There is already a growing demand for bicycle tours in China, which has good prospects to expand towards boating and hiking. Lastly, **historic interest tours** to Hunan can build on significant localities such as the birthplace of Mao Zedong, some sites of the Long March, the signing place of the Japanese surrender after World War II and the mausoleum of the mystical emperor Yandi.



There are strong links between the different themes, since for example Yandi is widely portrayed as the initiator of agriculture and medicine in China, and his mausoleum is situated in a beautiful rural landscape (see photos above). The latter is also true for Shaoshan, the birth place of Mao Zedong and the route of the Long March. If a part of the route could be prepared for car-free hiking, this would certainly be attractive for Europeans, who want to get a better understanding of the Long March, enjoy the exercise of hiking and appreciate the rural landscape at the same time. Revolutionary historical sites will not easily attract European tourists as pure sightseeing places, but if they can be integrated into rural holiday destinations it would make those destinations more meaningful and give them an advantage over other rural areas in China. A second key point would be that those "red" tourism destinations have already developed the necessary infrastructure and accessibility, the lack of which hinders the tourism development in many rural areas.

## Anchor destinations and their possible links

A central recommendation is to build a marketing strategy for Europe not on the province as the main destination, but to use the higher potential of one or two anchor destinations and hope to then construct links to secondary destinations from there. This requires both a strong anchor and viable links.

The internationally most promising choice for core destination in Hunan is **Zhangjiajie (Wulingyuan)**, a vast and spectacular landscape of sandstone rocks (see photos below). It is a world heritage site, has experience with foreign, although mostly Korean, tourism and it is a really spectacular place - probably the only first-class destination in Hunan. After the opening of the new airport and the installation of cable cars, the infrastructure is largely in place. What restrains the development of this unique and stunning landscape for European tourism is a lack of information. The place has rather incidentally been discovered by Korean tourists after photographs have been published. One reason for the success on the Korean market was its name. In Korean "Zhangjiajie" has a very beautiful connotation (apparently something like paradise).



Unfortunately in most European languages "Zhangjiajie" sounds neither beautiful nor meaningful. Both "Zh" and "ji" are rather uncommon sounds in the major European languages. They are hard to pronounce and difficult to remember. This may sound like a minor issue, but the **recognisability and connotation of the name** can make a big difference. I therefore strongly recommend avoiding the name "Zhangjiajie" as much as possible, although this is the name of the city and district. There seems to be no way to translate it, so one could either use artificial terms such as "Sandstone Forest" or "Stone Paradise" or use the name "Wuling Mountains" or "Wulingyuan". "Wuling" is easier to

write and remember for Europeans. Incidentally, Wulingyuan is also the name under which the UNESCO has registered the landscape as World Heritage site (there is no mention of Zhangjiajie - which may again be more an administrative term). The Wuling Mountains are furthermore marked in many foreign atlases, most of which do not include the name Zhangjiajie. Overall, I suggest coining the name "**Wulingyuan Stone Paradise**". This is a name foreigners can remember, it refers to the term used for World Heritage registration, indicates the type of resource and signals something outstanding, and - last but not least it adopts the idea of paradise, which was so successful in Korea.

The further development of the resources would need to take the **needs of European tourists** into account. They are somewhat different from the needs of Korean tourists. Most obviously, there will be a need for higher proficiency in English (service personnel and signage). Furthermore, European tourists demand more individuality. They will not necessarily arrive in groups, and they will not stay together all the time. They therefore require more and different information about finding accommodation, transport and sightseeing spots. It is crucial for them to find visitor centres, good maps and signage. Thirdly, they may not be satisfied with a programme that mainly consists of sightseeing and taking photographs. They will attempt to escape the overcrowded sightseeing spots and find quieter and less developed areas. They will also want to pursue alternative activities such as hiking and cycling in the valleys and sports such as paragliding. Fourthly, Europeans tend to be less accepting towards landscape change or "enhancement" than Asians. They prefer to see the rocks, caves and valleys in a near-natural state. They additionally appreciate an integrated experience of nature and local culture - especially in an area like this, which is inhabited by minority people. For this reason, as well as in consideration of the need for service personnel, and in order to use tourism for poverty alleviation, there should be no resettlement of the local population.

As the anchor destination in Hunan, Zhangjiajie would together with Changsha play a leading role in **developing expertise** for new tourism markets. It would be expected that both the tourists and this expertise will gradually spread out from the anchor destination to the northern and western parts of the province - especially to the beautiful mountains, rivers and small towns south of Zhangjiajie (see photos below) and to Dongting Lake and the provincial capital east of it.





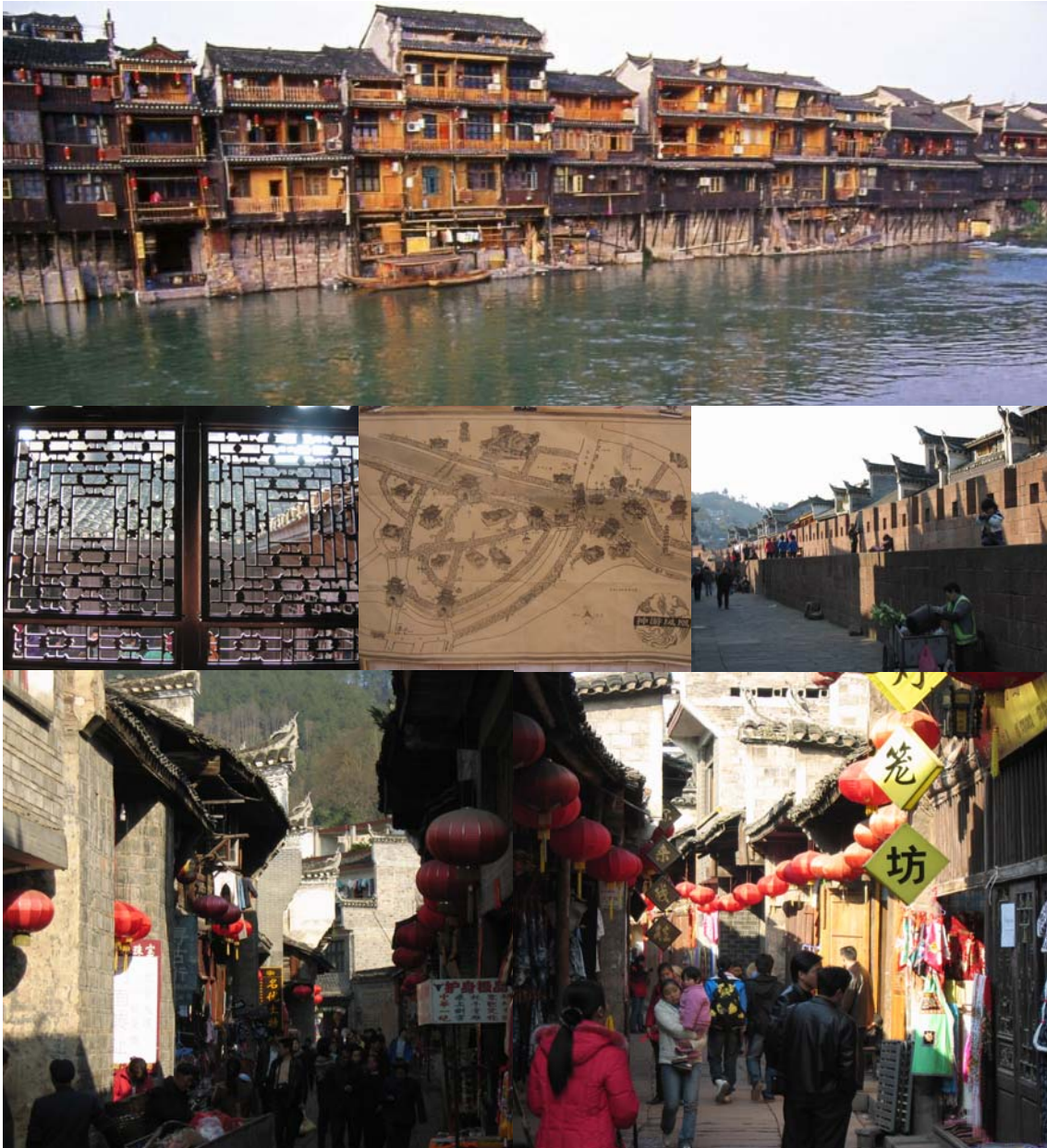


**Previous page:** The You Shui River near Furong Town (Wangcun)

**This page:** Zuolong Canyon and Red Limestone Forest near Guzhang

The Jishou and Huaihua prefectures in the **western part of Hunan** are mountainous and criss-crossed by numerous small rivers. The landscape is not as spectacular as in the neighbouring Zhangjiajie area, but it is beautiful and full of variation. The bigger rivers provide great opportunities for boat tours, the smaller ones for rafting. There are several outstanding places, such as the Zuolong Canyon and the Red Limestone Forest near Guzhang, which can be discovered by foot. The landscape can also be appreciated by car or by bicycle. It will be crucial for the future development of tourism to separate the fast transit traffic from slow sightseeing routes, which are scenic, provide viewpoints and can safely be used by cyclists as well. It is also strongly recommended to focus on various forms of boat tourism, including rafting, small boats with simple sleeping facilities for families and small groups and hotel ships.

The population in the west, along the borders to Sichuan, Guizhou and Guangxi, consists of mostly national minorities, especially Tujia, but also Miao and Dong. Their culture can be appreciated in the villages, but also the very attractive small towns of the region, most famously Fenghuang and Furong Town. These places benefit from their earlier slow economic development, which has allowed their historical structures to remain largely intact. With this heritage they fit extremely well into travelling habits in Europe, where historical small towns are among the most popular destinations. Many European China visitors actually mention it as a deficit, that most Chinese cities are not quiet, pedestrian-friendly and well-restored. There is a demand, but unfortunately, these particular towns are still virtually unknown in Europe.



**Fenghuang**, the "Phoenix City" (see photos above), is the best known and arguably the most picturesque of these towns. It features romantic scenes along the Tuo River, many small alleys with mostly historical buildings and shopping opportunities for tourist (especially food and handicraft). Fenghuang is already very much developed for tourism and attracts many people. Most of them are still from within China, but this includes a significant proportion of Hong Kong visitors, which is often a first step towards international place recognition.

One problem of Fenghuang may be its limited international recognition, but an even bigger issue the low capacity for visitors. Even at the present stage of tourism development the small town is already very crowded. This shows its attractiveness, but it is also a sign that saturation has been reached. To maintain the attractiveness of Fenghuang, more historical towns in the region should be restored and promoted, and some off-peak events should be organised to achieve a better distribution of tourist flows in time and space.



The first candidate to share the fame of Fenghuang is the so-called **Furong Town**, which means "Hibiscus Town" (see photos above). It is picturesque as well, but less-known than Fenghuang, although it derives some fame in China from the well-known movie "Hibiscus Town", after which it was renamed (real name: Wangcun). Since this movie is unknown in Europe, Furong Town has to rely on different images to tap into the new market, but given its high aesthetic and heritage value this should not be a problem. The bigger issues here as well are accessibility and limited capacity.

This case reminds of the situation of some of the most beautiful German historical small towns such as Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Nördlingen in Bavaria. They have already in the 1950s teamed up under the theme of "**The Romantic Road**" in order to promote themselves to new overseas tourism markets and in order to better distribute the tourist flow among the small towns (<http://www.romantischestrassen.de/?lang=uk>). This has become a very well-known brand all over the world. For Fenghuang, Jishou, Furong Town and others in the region such a Romantic Road, probably starting somewhere in the Wulingyuan Stone Paradise, would at the same time provide a viable link to the better-known anchor destination of Zhangjiajie.

A major feature, although probably not the main one, of this Chinese "Romantic Road" would definitely be the **minority culture**. The whole area is inhabited mostly by Tujia and other non- Han people. Their villages and towns are well-preserved, and their dresses and customs add many beautiful and interesting aspects to the atmosphere of this region (see photos below). However, the main image of this tourist route could still be "romantic" rather than "exotic", because there are so many areas with an arguably even richer minority culture in China (e.g. Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi). Hunan may not be competitive enough on this account only.





Not only from the mountainous terrain and the dominance of minority population we can see that the Jishou and Huaihua prefectures are a border area, there is even a monument, resembling the Great Wall, which has been restored to become a tourist attraction (see photos above). This **Southern Great Wall** has originally been built by the Han Chinese to protect their territory against the non-Han peoples living in the mountains and behind them in Guizhou and Guangxi. It is therefore interesting to see that nowadays this wall is presented by the minority descendents of these peoples as their heritage. In any case, it is a very photogenic site, which blends landscape, history and cultural heritage in a nice way.

There are more places of historic interest that even Europeans can relate to. Apart from the histories of Mao Zedong and the Long March, which feature prominently in other parts of Hunan, Huaihua has a very significant historic site, which is rather unknown in the western world. Apparently, the signing of the Japanese capitulation after the Second World War took place in a Sino-American military base in **Zhijiang**, near Huaihua. This base is still preserved (see pictures below), but it has only a few visitors. Because of the political circumstances it is a rare place in China to see the National Flag alongside the US and British, and even the Kuomintang flag. There are connections between Zhijiang and Reims in France due to their role in commemorating the Second World War and especially the re-establishing of peace after this war. Not only in France, but in the whole of Europe the Second World War is an issue many people relate to and naturally have some interests in. I would recommend using this interest not with a focus on war, but with a focus on peace, to attract European visitors.



Apart from connecting the anchor destination Wulingyuan Stone Paradise to the western part of Hunan (Jishou and Huaihua), for example by way of a Romantic Road, a second link eastwards should be developed **to the northern part of Hunan** (Dongting Lake, Changsha and Shaoshan). Especially Dongting Lake as a nature tourism destination complements the attractions of Zhangjiajie well.



**Dongting Lake** (see photos above) is considered the second largest lake in China, but actually the size of the water body is constantly changing with the water level of the Yangtze River. The shallow lakes and adjacent mudflats are considered a wetland of high international importance. They feature abundant animal and plant life, especially water-birds, and are a significant nature tourism destination with special appeal to bird-watchers. The fish inside Dongting Lake (actually the Dongting Lakes) is also a rich resource for fishing and food tourism.

The flat agricultural land surrounding the lakes is one of the best destinations for **cycling tourism** in Hunan. Cycling tourism is seen as a booming segment for many years in Europe, and especially rural regions see it as a good investment, because cycling tourists will stay in a region for a significant time-span and spend most money in rural regions. It is a very sustainable branch of tourism with low environmental impact. Dedicated bicycle routes are also a way to actively link certain destinations, such as for example Zhanjiajie and Dongting Lake, together. There are several tour operators, who specialise in offering cycling tours in most parts of China to foreigners, but Hunan is so far not a major destination for them ([www.bikechina.com/schedule.php](http://www.bikechina.com/schedule.php), [www.china-by-bike.de/](http://www.china-by-bike.de/)). Crucial preconditions for attracting cycling tourism to Hunan would be the development of good and safe small roads, ideally without car traffic noise, a suitable signage system, the availability of good maps and the indication of hotels and restaurants along the routes.

There is also a great potential for **boat tours** in many parts of Hunan, and especially around the Dongting Lakes. The lakes themselves are a great resource for canoeing, sailing and pleasure boats. They can be compared to the Great Masurian Lakes in Poland (<http://travel.poland.com/texts/en/t-ap-4-3.php>), which are a very successful cycling and boating destination. Additionally to the value of the lakes themselves, Dongting is the meeting point of four major rivers, the Xiang and Yuan Rivers as the main rivers of Hunan and the Li Shui (leading to Zhangjiajie) and Zi Shui (leading south to Shaoyang). All these rivers can form valuable links between the destinations in the province - especially for people travelling by boat, but also as routes for cyclists and motorists.

While connecting in the west to the Wulingyuan Stone Paradise by river (Yuanjiang and Li Shui), road, rail and cycling route, Dongting Lake should also be connected to the east. The Xiangjiang would provide one opportunity. Another one is the Jingguang Railway, which can be reached in **Yueyang** - a place, famous for the Yueyang Tower, at the shore of Dongting Lake - or the provincial capital **Changsha**. Changsha is important for its airport and train station, for its developed tourism infrastructure and to some extent for its own resources. Changsha airport is well-connected, but it is already second in terms of traffic behind Zhangjiajie. This reflects the high attractiveness of Zhangjiajie (Wulingyuan) and confirms the recommended decision for this place as the province's anchor destination.

From Changsha the neighbouring cities Zhuzhou and Xiangtan can easily be reached. The latter is important because it comprises the **birthplace of Mao Zedong**, Shaoshan. Like Changsha, where Mao has lived and become politically active, Shaoshan has long been a major destination for political and historical education tours. This market may be on the retreat, and it is not immediately transferable to foreign markets.

Mao is well-known in the West and the fact that he was from Hunan and especially Shaoshan can create significant interest, but the political and historical issues related to him are not easy to present to Westerners. Much of the knowledge necessary to understand the exhibits in the museums dedicated to Mao Zedong cannot be expected from non-Chinese. This would require very different **interpretation aids**, which would ideally be prepared by foreigners. At this point, surely much more than simple translation of language is necessary. Even additional explanation would not be enough. To relate to the experience and knowledge of Europeans, Chinese history should be presented as a part of world history. In the present exhibition, for example, some simple pictures of Mao meeting foreign politicians draw quite some attention of foreign visitors. More references to events outside China would provide a historical framework foreigners can connect with.

On top of this, interpretation is not only an issue of lacking historical knowledge. Mao is a very controversial figure to Europeans, who lack the emotional attachment to him and have deviating opinions on his policies. They would therefore demand a discursive and controversial approach to history apprehension, which may conflict with the intentions of the local people and institutions. Because of this, I would advocate a **diversified, depoliticised** and **modernised** approach to tourism development for European tourists in destinations like Shaoshan. Diversified means “red tourism” would be an additional ingredient rather than a singular attraction for Westerners. Depoliticised means historical rather than political education. Many Europeans are not convinced of Mao’s political achievements, but they are interested in him as an important historical figure, and they will like to get an idea about the living conditions of his family on the countryside during his childhood. Mao’s political career and achievements are strongly related to the countryside. This link between history and rural life should be used in the sense of diversification to attract European tourists to “red tourism” sites they would otherwise not visit. This could further be enhanced by activities such as cycling and boat tours (possibly also combined), hiking, farm visits and rural cultural events.



Images from the Karl-Marx House in Trier (Germany), which has decided to adopt a new approach to presenting Marx in an iconic way.

Lastly, modernised means to create modern images and portray Mao in a way that appeals to a new generation and to foreigners. For example, the Karl-Marx-House in Trier (Germany) was facing similar problems and decided to modernise the way how Karl Marx and the related history are presented. Without compromising the seriousness of content on display, they chose more artistic and modern exhibition techniques and they additionally sell Marx as an icon. With this makeover they have very successfully prevented the Karl-Marx House from the fate of other political Museums, which have suffered a terminal loss of interest due to political change. For Mao Zedong the situation is certainly somewhat different, but we can in Beijing and Hong Kong increasingly see his image used in an iconic way as well.

What has been said for Shaoshang, will similarly apply to other "red tourism" sites as well. The second very significant "red" theme is the history of the **Long March**, the beginning of which took place in the neighbouring Jiangxi Province and in the border region of Jiangxi and Hunan. There would be an obvious opportunity to link the theme of Long March with hiking tourism. It has for example become popular for tourists to Vietnam to walk part of the so-called Ho-Chi-Minh Path. There is also a big trend in Europe to walk the Saint-Jacob's Trail to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, not necessarily for religious pilgrimage but as a more meaningful way of activity tourism. Doing a part of the Long March would not only be activity tourism, it would also result in a deeper understanding of the efforts and suffering during this historic event.

The Long March, as well as for example minority cultures in Hunan's border areas to the neighbouring provinces, clearly call for a joint development of these resources by more than one province. A joint tourism development would also be necessary for any plans to promote the Jingguang Railway as something like a **Trans-China Railway**. For Hunan, apart from Yueyang and Changsha, the Hengshan mountain area would be the most important destination alongside the rail line. Additionally, along the Hunan-Jiangxi border there are other attractive mountain landscapes such as Taoyuandong National Forest Park (see photos below) and the above-mentioned mausoleum of Yandi, which could be developed as secondary destinations. They are accessible from the Jingguang Railway, but already quite far away from the anchor destination in the north-west of the province. Although this admittedly is a disadvantage of the recommended approach, I think it would not be very promising anyway to sell the whole province as one destination, nor would it be realistic to expect a significant number of European tourists to choose e.g. Yanling County as a destination for their tour through China.



*All photos taken by the author, except those of Dongting Lake and the river scene in Fenghuang.*