

Creative Nonfiction

Seven Huangshans

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1. I was nervous about being too cold, since it was going to be 15 degrees Fahrenheit. I wore five layers and then my winter coat, with tights and jeans. Gloves and hat and scarf. Within a few hundred yards of the trailhead I knew cold wasn't going to be a problem. A staircase led more-or-less straight up the mountain. My heart felt the work first, and then my legs. My phone told me later that I climbed 242 flights of stairs that day.
2. From UNESCO's World Heritage Centre website "Huangshan [Yellow Mountain], known as 'the loveliest mountain of China', was acclaimed through art and literature during a good part of Chinese history (e.g. the Shanshui 'mountain and water' style of the mid-16th century). Today it holds the same fascination for visitors, poets, painters and photographers who come on pilgrimage to the site, which is renowned for its magnificent scenery made up of many granite peaks and rocks emerging out of a sea of clouds."
3. "In spring of the year *hsin-ssu* [1641], I made a date with Ch'eng Meng-yang ... to undertake an excursion to the Yellow Mountains. We planned to find each other at West Stream, Wu-lin, at the time of flowering plum blossoms. When he failed to arrive [there] for over a month ... my enthusiasm for visiting the Yellow Mountains abated somewhat. But then a letter arrived from Hsi Wei-han urging me to get underway, and upon reading it, my arms started lifting as if to fly, so I took Wu Ch'iu-ch'en with me and started off."—The scholar and poet Ch'ien Ch'ien-I, as translated and reproduced in Jonathan Graves' "The Yellow Mountain Poems of Ch'ien Ch'ien-i (1582-1664): Poetry as *Yu-chi*."
4. Jiaqiao says, "When we [he means people from Anhui province] talk about Huangshan spirit, we are referring to a welcoming, persistent characteristic." I think this might be connected to the "welcoming pine," (*ying ke song*), which appears on my ticket to the bus we take to the trailhead. Mengqi told me that the pine also gives its name to a popular brand of cigarettes made in the

- nearby city of Wuhu. The city's page on the Cigarettespedia site says: "Yingkesong' cigarette is the pride of Wuhu people, and the old saying 'The tree of friendship will be green forever.'"
5. At the base of the mountain, a red billboard with a photo of the mountain, Deng Xiaoping in the foreground. His walking shorts stop just above his endearingly wrinkly knees. Emblazoned in red, "This is the birthplace of Chinese tourism." Does this mean that this is the first tourist site developed in the post-reform era, or are the stream of travelers and poets that went to the mountain over hundreds of years before then also included as tourists? Jiaqiao says that about thirty years ago the town next to the mountain changed its name to Huangshan City to attract more tourists. Now many people want to bring back the name the town had for thousands of years, Huizhou. He says, "It is not that people don't like Huangshan, but they think [the name] Huangshan makes people ignore the beauty of Huizhou and forget about the history."
 6. I asked Mengqi about her memories of the mountain when she was growing up. She said, "Mt. Huangshan had always been there like a big marker of my home province. I don't recall a specific point of learning about it, probably because it is just there, always there (which may be the reason that I've never visited it). However, I remember relatives and friends who came to visit the mountain. Yet when they came back, the talk invariably was about the large number of tourists, the difficulty of the road uphill, and the sunburn. I'm not sure if it is because the mountain itself is not beautiful or maybe its beauty is taken for granted."
 7. The leaves and trees are painted with ice. We crack perfect ice-molds of leaves and berries off the trees and suck on them as we walk, to cool ourselves. Each gust of air moves as its own creature, separate from any other current. Each one curls soft around our necks or ankles. The rocks invite names like "two cats mousing" and "dog barking at the moon." At the top, we take pictures of everything and of each other, knowing the images won't do what we want them to do. They won't hold the mountain still for us.