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# PROJECTING THE ROAD: TOPOLOGICAL PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE YUNNAN-BURMA FRONTIER

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*This article examines photography of the Sino-Burmese border at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing on the road between Tengyue (Tengchong) in Yunnan and Bhamo in Burma, the article considers a photographic series by Albert Pichon of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs to explore how the frontier was perceived and understood in the context of imperial expansion, infrastructural transformation and foreign-mediated globalization. The Maritime Customs, at the frontier between Chinese and foreign power, had a key part in controlling and conceptualizing the borders of late Qing China. This article examines photography as a projection of the topological understanding of space within the Maritime Customs, within which frontier locations were seen as a 'link in the chain' and a 'stage on the journey'.*

**KEYWORDS:** China, Yunnan, photography, frontier, Tengyue, roads, Maritime Customs, Albert Pichon

Tengyueh can only be considered as a stage on the journey to the interior of West Yunnan. The neighbourhood is neither thickly populated nor important... [it] is but a link in the chain that connects British India to West China. It absorbs no considerable quantity of foreign goods and produces little or nothing of value.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years after China's Maritime Customs opened in Tengyue (now Tengchong), its senior staff - all foreigners - had a clear picture of the city's place in Chinese foreign trade. It was, the Maritime Customs officers in the town reported, scarcely a place at all, 'neither... populated nor important'. Focusing on the road between Tengyue in Yunnan and Bhamo in Burma, this article considers a 1908-9 photographic series by Albert Pichon of the Maritime Customs to explore how the photography of the road shaped geographical understandings of the Chinese frontier in the context of imperial expansion and infrastructural transformation. China's Maritime Customs operated as what Hans van de Ven calls a 'frontier regime', both focused *on* the frontier and located

<sup>1</sup> *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Industries, Etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce, 1902-1911* (Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1913), vol. 2, pp. 303, 304.

in China's frontier space.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the attention paid to Maritime Customs operations, little attention has been paid to the role of the Customs in shaping understandings of the Chinese frontier. In particular, the increasing role of the 'Maritime' Customs in regulating overland trade (and therefore in shaping overland frontiers) has been largely ignored. Focusing on the Sino-Burmese frontier in Western Yunnan and making use of photographic sources, this article argues that the Maritime Customs understood the Chinese frontier not as a line on a map but as a road across it, shaped by geographies not of *space* (as in conventional cartography) but of *networks* (for people and goods to move from one point to another).

Roads are essential to understanding Qing society and trade, yet compared to the well-traveled history of railways and shipping,<sup>3</sup> research into the road network in late Qing China is in its infancy.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere was the road network more important than in Yunnan, where railway construction was difficult and where the silk roads had crossed for millennia, but caravan routes have received far more attention than the roads themselves.<sup>5</sup> The neglect of roads is surely undeserved; as Robert Bickers has argued, 'infrastructural globalization... is not simply a European or colonial story... [and] if the history of technology can provide a "hidden history" of European integration... it can also provide a cognate history of the emergence of the modern Chinese state.'<sup>6</sup> New forms of transportation may literally reshape the state, creating long-distance empires and new borders, and producing what has been called 'time compression... in the sense that places and spaces... experience intensified interaction.'<sup>7</sup>

As well as creating tangible connection, roads are also powerful visual symbols which, as represented in photography, exerted a profound influence on understandings of space.<sup>8</sup> For Joan Schwartz and James Ryan, 'geography and photography became partners in picturing place... [and] making "imaginative geographies"... the mechanism by which people come to know the world and

<sup>2</sup> H. J. van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bickers, 'Infrastructural Globalization: Lighting the China Coast, 1860s–1930s', *The Historical Journal*, 56.2 (2013), 431–458; Lee En-han, *China's Quest for Railway Autonomy, 1904–1911: A Study of the Chinese Railway-Rights Recovery Movement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977); F. Patrikeeff and H. Shukman, *Railways and the Russo-Japanese War: Transporting War* (London: Routledge, 2007); R. W. Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse: The Economics of Railroads in China, 1876–1937* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Wang Chengjin et al., '中国道路网络的通达性评价与演化机理', *地理学报*, 69.10 (2014), 1496–1509.

<sup>5</sup> C. P. Giersch, 'Cotton, Copper and Caravans: Trade and the Transformation of Southwest China', in *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia*, ed. by E. Tagliacozzo and Wen-chin Chang (Duke University Press, 2011); Ma Jianxiong and Ma Cunzhao, 'The Mule Caravans of Western Yunnan: An Oral History of the Muleteers of Zhaozhou', *Transfers*, 4.3 (2014), 24–42.

<sup>6</sup> Bickers, p. 447.

<sup>7</sup> Tsukasa Mizushima, G. B. Souza, and D. O. Flynn, 'Introduction', in *Hinterlands and Commodities: Place, Space, Time and the Political Economic Development of Asia over the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. J. Foster, 'Capturing and Losing the "Lie of the Land": Railway Photography and Colonial Nationalism in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa', in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, ed. by J. Schwartz and J. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 141–61.

situate themselves in space and time'.<sup>9</sup> In observing photography, we simultaneously perceive ourselves; in Patrick Maynard's phrase, when we perceive space in a photograph, 'this perceptual information "points two ways," since it also provides us with a strong sense of a point of view.'<sup>10</sup> This approach to geographical photography embraces not only (or principally) photography by geographers, but also landscape photography, travel, advertising, science and personal snapshots, since a photograph can shape and reflect the geographical imaginary regardless of whether the photographic practice which produced it was engaged with geography, geographical subject matter, or neither.

To describe photography which documents place, regardless of genre and practice, Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest propose the term 'topographical photography'.<sup>11</sup> This article focuses not on topographical photography but on what we might call *topological photography*, that is to say, photography which emphasizes networks and connections *between* locations over the locations themselves. Geographical topology - the connections between points and lines - may be most familiar in relation to topological maps.<sup>12</sup> A topological perspective can also be understood more generally, however, as a kind of warping of space into networks, so that 'movement—organized in terms of the topological invariants of ordering and continuity of transformation—composes the forms of social and cultural life themselves'.<sup>13</sup> Where topographical photography creates a sense of place, topological photography attenuates place, making present space and time less salient than the network itself. In Yunnan, governance was dominated by slow communications with the rest of China and strong local connections, including across the frontier. The term 'Zomia' was coined by Willem van Schendel to describe inland and upland areas of Southeast Asia where states struggled to exert control deep into the twentieth century (and beyond).<sup>14</sup> Yi Li has noted that the Sino-Burmese frontier was 'at the heart of "Zomia"', characterized by 'distinct social configurations' and 'transnational flows'.<sup>15</sup> This article uses photography to consider how those engaged in globalizing projects, steeped in a geographical imaginary of infrastructure and movement, attempted to make

<sup>9</sup> J. Schwartz and J. Ryan, 'Introduction: Photography and the Geographical Imagination', in *Picturing Place*, pp. 8, 6.

<sup>10</sup> P. Maynard, 'Scales of Space and Time in Photography: "Perception Points Two Ways"', in *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, ed. by S. Walden (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> H. Van Gelder and H. Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), p. 12. Topographical photography in this sense is not to be confused with photo-topography, which is the use of photography in surveying.

<sup>12</sup> For the debate on what kinds of spatial plan can properly be considered a map, see W. Cartwright, 'Rethinking the Definition of the Word "Map": An Evaluation of Beck's Representation of the London Underground through a Qualitative Expert Survey', *International Journal of Digital Earth*, 8.7 (2015), 522–37.

<sup>13</sup> C. Lury, 'Topological Sense-Making: Walking the Mobius Strip from Cultural Topology to Topological Culture', *Space and Culture*, 16.2 (2013), 128–32.

<sup>14</sup> W. van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, ed. by P. H. Kratoska, R. Raben, and H. S. Nordholt (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), pp. 284–85.

<sup>15</sup> Yi Li, 'Governing the Chinese in Multi-Ethnic Colonial Burma between the 1890s and 1920s', *South East Asia Research*, 24.1 (2016), 135.

sense of the Zomian landscape at the Yunnan-Burma border.

## THE YUNNAN COMPANY AND THE YUNNAN PICTURESQUE

The *Times* newspaper memorably claimed in 1860 that ‘in confining our trade to the southern and eastern seaboard of China, we are but scratching the rind of that mighty realm. The best Chinese products, and the best customers for our goods, all lie inland toward the west’.<sup>16</sup> A flawed - yet notably persistent - belief had emerged that Yunnan was the lynchpin of European competition in Asia: a gateway to overland trade with China which would bestow both decisive strategic advantage and limitless commercial opportunities. Warren Walsh called this conviction the ‘Yunnan myth’.<sup>17</sup> Mid-century British imperialists were captivated by the potential they perceived in connections to Yunnan. The part of the Southwestern Silk Road which links Chengdu to the Irrawaddy was brought to British attention by John Crawfurd in 1827.<sup>18</sup> The 茶马古道 *chama gudao* or Tea-Horse Roads were caravan routes which brought Yunnan tea into South Asia and Tibet to the west, as well as east into Sichuan, and took Tibetan ponies around the region’s mountainous uplands.<sup>19</sup> In 1858, the Indian surveyor Richard Sprye proposed a Burma-China railway in 1858 to open a ‘direct route’ for trade via the Shan States.<sup>20</sup> Both Britain and France were anxious to establish railway routes into Yunnan, with the real prize being a connection to Kunming and onwards to Sichuan. At a meeting at the Royal Geographical Society in 1860, the naturalist and photographer John M’Cosh insisted that the route from Bhamo to Tengyue was the most promising, describing

a great stream of Chinese commerce between that country and Burma. Caravans of thirty and forty mules or bullocks constantly arrive. About five hundred Chinese are said to come every year to Bhamo and transact business to an amount of 700,000/... The Chinese exports that pass Bhamo are gold and silver ingots, brass and copper vessels, mercury, arsenic, vermilion, carpets, fans, silk fabrics, spices, rhubarb, musk, dried fruits, &c. The return cargo is cotton wool, ivory, edible birds' nests, and British woollens and calico.<sup>21</sup>

Anglo-French interest in Yunnan peaked near the end of the nineteenth century, as both extended their imperial territories to abut China’s borders. After Britain established control in Upper Burma, the Chinese agreed in 1894 to open a port on the Burma border, and the tiny village of

<sup>16</sup> ‘In Another Column of Our Impression...’, *The Times*, 11 October 1860, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> W. B. Walsh, ‘The Yunnan Myth’, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 2.3 (1943), 272–85. See also Bin Yang, *Between Winds and Clouds: The Making of Yunnan (Second Century BCE to Twentieth Century CE)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), chap. 2 n149.

<sup>18</sup> R. C. Croizier, ‘Antecedents of the Burma Road: British Plans for a Burma-China Railway in the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 3.2 (1962), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Yang, chap. 2.

<sup>20</sup> R. S. M. Sprye, *The British and China Railway, from Rangoon ... to the Yunnan Province of China* (London, 1858); R. S. M. Sprye and R. H. F. Sprye, ‘Communication with the South-West Provinces of China from Rangoon in British Pegu’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 5.2 (1860), 45–47.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. M’Cosh, ‘On the Various Lines of Overland Communication between India and China’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 5.2 (1860), 49–50.

Manghuan (Manwyne) was suggested. The British diplomat Augustus Margary had been killed there in February 1875 while traveling at the behest of the India Office to investigate the viability of an overland route.<sup>22</sup> Instead the British selected Tengyue, a sizeable town about 100 km from the border as the crow flies, though considerably further by road and at least a week by pack animal.<sup>23</sup>

The first serious attempt to photograph the Bhamo-Tengyueh road came from the Yunnan Company, a venture organized by British railway entrepreneur John Halliday. From the start, the Yunnan Company's primary objective was a railway connecting Burma to the Yangtze. Halliday had been considering the idea since at least 1897, when he was still working on a railway venture in Arakan.<sup>24</sup> In 1898, the Company retained Major Henry Rodolph Davies to conduct a survey of the railway prospects on the Yunnan frontier.<sup>25</sup> Davies was uniquely qualified to evaluate the feasibility of the Yunnan Company's scheme, combining knowledge of Chinese, familiarity with Yunnan, cartographic expertise, and excellent connections to the British authorities in Burma; as an intelligence officer with the British Army in Burma, Davies had first visited Yunnan as a member of the Burma-China Boundary Commission in 1893.<sup>26</sup> Included in Davies' party were several keen amateur photographers. The most significant was Captain W. A. Watts-Jones of the Royal Engineers, who produced a set of 238 photographs of Yunnan.<sup>27</sup> Watts-Jones was killed in 1900 in Guihua (Hohhot) during the Boxer Rebellion, after spending some months in northwestern China.<sup>28</sup> The Guihua *daotai* seems not to have known he had succeeded in executing no typical European traveler but 'the best authority on the subject of railways in western China'.<sup>29</sup> Davies himself also took photographs, as did several other members of the party.<sup>30</sup> Captain C. H. D. Ryder, leading an accompanying group from the Indian Survey, produced at least one informative photograph of the Yunnan expedition.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> A. R. Margary, *Notes of a Journey from Hankow to Ta-Li Fu* (Shanghai: F. & C. Walsh, 1875), pp. 3–4.

<sup>23</sup> R. Nield, *China's Foreign Places the Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840-1943* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), p. 234 says 50km point-to-point, but both modern and contemporary maps have the distance at around 60 miles or 100 kilometers.

<sup>24</sup> J. Turner, 'Yunnan. The Present Conditions and Future Development of Trade', 1898, British Library India Office, IOR/L/PS/18/B116.

<sup>25</sup> H. R. Davies, *Yün-Nan. The Link between India and the Yangtze* (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), pp. 7–8, 114.

<sup>26</sup> H. R. Davies, 'Report on the Part of Yunnan between the Bhamo Frontier and the Salween', 1894, British Library India Office, IOR/L/PS/20/94.

<sup>27</sup> *Watts-Jones Photographic Collection*, September 1898, Royal Geographical Society.

<sup>28</sup> 'Captain Watts-Jones' last journey' in Davies, *Yün-Nan*, pp. 300–302. A more lurid account is in 'The Late Captain Watts-Jones, R.E.', *Straits Times*, 25 March 1901, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *Yün-Nan*, p. 302. Mrs. Watts-Jones presented the Yunnan photographs to the Royal Geographical Society 'with the permission of the Yunnan Company, as a memorial of her husband': 'New Maps: Yunnan. Watts-Jones', *The Geographical Journal*, 21.5 (1903), 587.

<sup>30</sup> Davies, *Yün-Nan*, p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Plate I in C. H. D. Ryder, 'Exploration in Western China', *The Geographical Journal*, 21.2 (1903), after p. 110; also as plate VII in Davies, *Yün-Nan*, after p. 32. Perhaps inspired by Watts-Jones's efforts, Ryder produced a much more substantial body of geographical photography of Tibet a few years later during the Younghusband Mission of 1904: *C. H. D. Ryder Photographic Collection*, 1904, Royal Geographical Society.

Watts-Jones's photographs exemplified the breadth of possible approaches to geographical photography: his work was *geographical*, but hardly *topological*. The set was recorded by the Royal Geographical Society as 'taken during his surveying expedition for the railway route from the Kunlong Ferry to the Yangtse kiang' but Watts-Jones had begun, naturally enough, where the party began: with the Bhamo-Tengyue road.<sup>32</sup> Only later did Davies conclude that though the Bhamo-Tengyue railway route was perhaps feasible, the Lashio-Yunzhou (Yunxian) route was substantially preferable, crossing the border a hundred miles to the southeast near Kunlong.<sup>33</sup> Watts-Jones took multiple fine hillside landscapes during his stretch of the journey, but few of his photographs documented the road itself. In his heavily illustrated 1909 work *Yün-nan: the link between India and the Yangtze*, which combined travelogue with a discussion of railway routes, Henry Davies devoted a full chapter to the Bhamo-Tengyue road, and described the route in some detail, but could include only two photographs of it.<sup>34</sup>

Ever the salesman, Halliday of the Yunnan Company could not conceal his disappointment with visual aids displayed by Ryder for his presentation on the expedition to the Royal Geographical Society in 1903.<sup>35</sup> 'I would impress upon the audience,' Halliday insisted during the discussion after the paper, 'that they should not take their ideas of Yunnan from those photographs. You will have observed that the terraces were as precipitous as the mountains all around the valleys, showing that the photographs do not do justice to the country as a railway country'. Watts-Jones' picturesque landscapes captured instead Yunnan's lush, steep valleys and the sharp, photogenic lines of its mountains. Spacing out his photographic supplies out along his lengthy journey, Watts-Jones preferred aesthetically compelling subject matter. Erik Mueggler has said of foreign botanists that 'walking over the border into Yunnan put all the certainties of empire into question... each attempted to find places of pure vision where the ambiguities of perception and representation might melt away.'<sup>36</sup> Watts-Jones's photography evokes Erik Mueggler's idea that Yunnan could become a place of 'pure vision'; so pure, indeed, that in Watts-Jones's photographic-geographical imagination, the railway was all but forgotten.

## THE PICHONS AND THE TOPOLOGY OF IMPERIALISM

In the background of the Yunnan myth was the Anglo-French competition in Southeast Asia,

<sup>32</sup> 'New Maps: Yunnan. Watts-Jones'.

<sup>33</sup> Davies, *Yün-Nan*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Davies, Watts-Jones and Ryder 'all left Bhamo together on the 16th November [1898] and went by the usual road to Manwaing [Manyung]'. From Manyung, where Margary had been killed twenty years earlier, Watts-Jones and Ryder took the more familiar road on the left (south) bank of the Taping River, while Davies took 'a somewhat longer route via Chan-ta' (Zhanda, on the northern bank of the Taping) and rejoined the left-bank road at Jiucheng. Davies, *Yün-Nan*, chap. XV, esp. pp. 114-15

<sup>35</sup> Ryder.

<sup>36</sup> E. Mueggler, *The Paper Road: Archive and Experience in the Botanical Exploration of West China and Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 34.

‘a mixture of African “scramble” and central Asian “great game”’.<sup>37</sup> Situated at the junction of French and British interests, ‘the rivalry was particularly acute’ in Yunnan.<sup>38</sup> For the geographical and colonial enthusiast Henri de Bizemont, the purpose of French expeditions to the Mekong and beyond was for France to acquire a ‘a colonial empire as vast and flourishing as the English possessions’ with the Mekong as that empire’s ‘grand artery’.<sup>39</sup> Anglo-French competition in Southeast Asia reached such a peak in the later nineteenth century that an official French mission suspected that a vandalized inscription at Angkor Wat could be the work of ‘an anglophile tourist’.<sup>40</sup>

Before he ever arrived in Tengyue, the future Maritime Customs officer Albert Pichon had an interest in Yunnan through his father Louis, a French doctor who was well-known in Shanghai, and ardent believer in the importance of Yunnan trade. Dr Louis Pichon arrived in the International Settlement in 1871, retiring from practice in 1892.<sup>41</sup> After retirement, Pichon threw himself into a second career as an advocate of French imperialism, at which he was successful enough to be cited by the explorer-imperialist Prince Henri d’Orléans, and translated into Italian.<sup>42</sup> Despite spending most of his professional life in Shanghai, Louis Pichon developed a particular interest in Southeast Asia. He visited Tonkin in 1882 and again in 1888, the trips bracketing the French conquest in 1883-5. Dr Pichon soon became frustrated with what he found to be the excessively slow pace of French expansionism, arguing in his 1893 *Notes sur la question siamoise* that ‘The protectorate which we have assumed in Annam and Cambodia has created obligations for us which the interest and honour of France do not permit her to elude much longer’. There was, Pichon claimed, ‘a moral law which we persist in ignoring in Europe, and which nevertheless is as formal and inflexible as the commercial law of supply and demand. Magnanimity and moderation are translated by these people [Asians] with the words “fear and powerlessness”. They respect only force and its manifestations... In a country where everything is done counter to the Western way, one catches flies *not with sugar* but *with vinegar*’.<sup>43</sup>

In the same year that Louis Pichon wrote so trenchantly about Siam, he had begun to turn his attention to Yunnan and the navigability of the Red River. He visited Yunnan for the first time in

<sup>37</sup> J. Keay, ‘The Mekong Exploration Commission, 1866–68: Anglo-French Rivalry in South East Asia\*’, *Asian Affairs*, 36.3 (2005), 289.

<sup>38</sup> J. L. Christian, ‘Anglo-French Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Its Historical Geography and Diplomatic Climate’, *Geographical Review*, 31.2 (1941), 281.

<sup>39</sup> E. Luro, *Le pays d’Annam: étude sur l’organisation politique et sociale des Annamites*, 2nd edn (Paris: E. Leroux, 1897), p. ii.

<sup>40</sup> F. Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996), p. 39.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Obituary: Dr. Louis Pichon’, *North China Herald*, 17 May 1924. Dr Pichon published research on the plague in early issues of the Chinese Medical Journal, and served as Shanghai municipal doctor in 1875-6 and again 1879-1889. A. F. Glaise, ‘L’évolution Sanitaire et Médicale de La Concession Française de Shanghai Entre 1850 et 1950’ (unpublished Ph.D., Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2005), p. 327.

<sup>42</sup> H. d’Orléans, *Around Tonkin and Siam* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1894); Louis Pichon, *Lo Yun-Nan* (Milano: Sonzogno, 1900).

<sup>43</sup> L. Pichon, *Notes sur la question siamoise* (Paris: Plon, 1893), pp. 5, 6.



April-May 1892, fulfilling a long-standing ambition, and used the journey for two books: his 1893 *Un voyage au Yunnan* and *Le Yunnan* in 1899.<sup>44</sup> Pichon had begun to consider commerce between Yunnan and French Indochina, a topic which, Pichon lamented, ‘we have absolutely neglected up till now, although it is of extreme importance for Tonkin’. Dr Pichon had returned from Yunnan ‘amazed at the development of business in Yunnan, which is growing every day, but saddened by the indifference and apathy of our nationals, who abandon all this profit to the Chinese, and in so doing deprive French industry of the share of the profits which would otherwise accrue to it from this immense traffic’.<sup>45</sup> Though Dr Pichon’s acid invective could hardly have been more different from the softly spoken diplomacy of Robert Hart, the Inspector General of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs, on one issue they were in agreement: the importance of trade. Pichon was delighted by the ‘remarkable serial publications and statistics of the Chinese Customs’, which he employed creatively in pursuit of his conclusion that the Yunnan trade was essential to the French position in Southeast Asia.<sup>46</sup> Dr Pichon’s 1892 trip to Yunnan focused on the navigability of the Red River, the ports at Manhao and Mengzi, and the tin mines at Gejiu. Mengzi had been opened to trade in 1887. The French authorities had been sufficiently uninterested in Mengzi that the first consul arrived only three years before Pichon in 1889, and a consulate building was not completed until 1893.<sup>47</sup> The first half of Louis Pichon’s 1893 *Un voyage au Yunnan* is structured as a travelogue, and for each day of the journey he describes his route carefully and provides practical information for subsequent travelers.<sup>48</sup>

[Fig. 1 near here]

Fig. 1. Albert Pichon, ‘Carte de Yünnan et du Tonkin’, in Louis Pichon, *Un voyage au Yunnan* (Paris: Plon, 1893).

Louis Pichon’s focus on routes and connections is reflected in the map he included in his 1893 book, on which his journey was marked with a dotted red line. Like photographs, imperial

<sup>44</sup> L. Pichon, *Un voyage au Yunnan* (Paris: Plon, 1893); L. Pichon, *Le Yunnan* (Paris: Plon, 1899).

<sup>45</sup> Pichon, *Un voyage au Yunnan*, p. vi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Nield, p. 158.

<sup>48</sup> Dr Pichon left Hanoi on 22 March 1892 by boat, arriving at the Red River port of Manhao on 19 April. From Manhao he continued on to the regional capital at Mengzi by land, travelling in a caravan in a sedan chair accompanied by horses and mules (p. 81, 82). On 22 April, they reached Mengzi. Dr Pichon left Mengzi on 29 April 1892 and traveled the 30km from Mengzi to the Gejiu tin mines in a single day (ch. 9, pp 121-133), travelling over the steep ground in a chair with porters (p. 122). On 30 April, Pichon toured the tin mining area (pp 133ff), returning to Mengzi the following day on 1 May. Pichon, *Un voyage au Yunnan, passim*.

maps are not ‘value free statements of spatial facts’, but are complex symbolic representations of imperial aspirations.<sup>49</sup> The map for *Un voyage au Yunnan* was produced by Albert Pichon, Louis’s son, about five years before he Albert joined the Maritime Customs; Albert’s first experience of geopolitical affairs was drawing the map of his father’s journey to and around the Gejiu mines.<sup>50</sup> Albert Pichon’s map had pretensions to cartographic authority, encompassing most of Yunnan and locating it against a coordinate grid. It was reasonably accurate up to Manhao on the Red River, but once Pichon left the river, every leg of the journey is drawn covering too large a distance; usually about twice as far as the true distance. Consequently the Pichons’ map shows Mengzi more than twenty kilometers northeast of its true location. Louis could afford to leave the cartography of his journey to his young son since his focus was on routes and connections, not on the country behind the road. Focused on the putative ‘immense traffic’ of the Yunnan trade, Louis Pichon’s geographical imagination was one of networks, not space, and it required topological, not topographic accuracy.

## TOPOLOGY AND SCALE IN CHINESE POSTAL MAPS

Both the Yunnan Company and Louis Pichon found interest in their ideas was cooling markedly by the turn of the century, as doubts set in about the potential value of the Yunnan trade and the stories of caravans of riches on the Tengyue-Bhamo road were debunked. In a withering 1898 article, the popular Scottish travel writer (and round-the-world cyclist) John Foster Fraser concluded of the Bhamo-Tengyue route that ‘what engineers cannot do it would be dangerous to guess, but a railway over or through these hills would be the most herculean task ever attempted.’<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Fraser questioned the commercial value of the attempt; traders, he believed, were being manipulated by the British government in Burma, which sought to establish a railway solely in order to outflank the French north of Tonkin. ‘Traders should once and for all abandon the hope that Yunnan is a rich mine, only waiting to be tapped. The present construction of a railway can mean nothing to them... commercially, there is nothing worth having in Western Yunnan... I therefore say to merchants anxious to open up a Western China trade, “Do not waste your energies in sucking the dry orange of Yunnan”.’<sup>52</sup> Another sceptic was Fred Carey, a Maritime Customs officer who had served in Simao.<sup>53</sup> Carey had amassed a sizeable collection of ethnographic photography, much of it

<sup>49</sup> M. H. Edney, ‘The Irony of Imperial Mapping’, in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, ed. by J. R. Akerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 11–46.

<sup>50</sup> Pichon, *Un voyage au Yunnan*, back cover insert.

<sup>51</sup> J. F. Fraser, ‘Our Trade with Western China’, *The Contemporary Review*, 73 (1898), 237.

<sup>52</sup> Fraser, 239, 240.

<sup>53</sup> A. Hillier, “‘With a Camera in Yunnan’: The Ethnographic Expeditions of Frederic W. Carey, RGS”, *Visualising China*, 2018 <<http://visualisingchina.net/blog/2018/03/29/with-a-camera-in-yunnan-the-ethnographic-expeditions-of-frederic-w-carey-rgs/>> and <<http://visualisingchina.net/blog/2018/04/27/with-a-camera-in-yunnan-the-ethnographic-expeditions-of-fred-w-carey-rgs/>>.

of Sipsongpanna, which he had recently presented to the RGS.<sup>54</sup> ‘Those who clamour for the construction of railways in China are apt to forget that it does not form part of the British Empire.’<sup>55</sup>

When he joined the Maritime Customs in 1898, Albert Pichon exchanged his father’s uncompromising imperialist perspective for a different type of networked geographical imaginary, this time on an even larger scale. Established during the Opium Wars as a foreign-staffed organization to tax and monitor China’s international trade, the Maritime Customs had, under Robert Hart (Inspector-General from 1863 to 1908), endeavored also to facilitate and increase China’s global links. From lighthouses to the postal service, Hart sought to connect China to transnational networks of infrastructure and commerce.<sup>56</sup> After many years of lobbying, Hart in 1896 finally succeeded in establishing an Imperial Post Office as part of the Maritime Customs (the Post Office became autonomous only in 1911).<sup>57</sup> Starting out with only a handful of staff and in competition with long-established private courier firms, the early Imperial Post Office could no more seek to deliver mail to every town in China than to deliver to the moon. From 1901, the Postal Secretary was a Frenchman, Théophile Piry, who focused his energy on expanding the postal service alongside the railway network.<sup>58</sup>

Thus a similar topological imperative to that which generated the Pichons’ artless map, driven by networks and connections, also guided the stunning cartography of the Imperial Post Office. In 1903 the Imperial Post Office created a schematic, topological map of China’s postal network. This stylized map showed post towns and the connections between them, and indicated the mode of transport for each stage. The connections between the towns of the China Postal Map were shown as straight lines, with no attempt to represent the physical topography of the routes. The Postal Map resembles a modern network diagram, with post towns as the nodes, and the connections between them as the edges.<sup>59</sup> The map was a success, and was followed in 1907 by an *Album* comprising more than twenty provincial maps, and further editions in 1919 and 1933.<sup>60</sup>

[Fig. 2 near here]

<sup>54</sup> F. W. Carey, ‘Journeys in the Chinese Shan States’, *The Geographical Journal*, 15.5 (1900), 486–515.

<sup>55</sup> Carey in ‘Exploration in Western China: Discussion’, *The Geographical Journal*, 21.2 (1903), 123.

<sup>56</sup> E. Reisz, ‘An Issue of Authority: Robert Hart, Gustav Detring and the Large Dragon Stamp’, in *The Large Dragon Stamp and the Customs Post of the Qing Dynasty*, ed. by Xie Chengzhang and Li Haiyong (Beijing: China National Post and Postage Stamp Museum, 2018), pp. 150–70.

<sup>57</sup> Cheng Ying-wan, *Postal Communication in China and its Modernization, 1860-1896* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1970), p. 917ff.

<sup>58</sup> Weipin Tsai, ‘The Qing Empire’s Last Flowering: The Expansion of China’s Post Office at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 49.03 (2015), 895–930.

<sup>59</sup> C. f. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, ed. by John Scott and Peter J. Carrington, 1 edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> *China. Postal Album showing the Post Offices and Postal Routes in each province*. (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1907); *China. Postal album: showing the postal establishments and postal routes in each province* (Peking: Directorate General of Posts, 1919), etc.

Fig. 2. *China. Postal Album showing the Post Offices and Postal Routes in each province.* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1907), no. 19, 雲南省/Yunnan.

The postal map sacrificed *topography* (representing the shape of geographical features) for clarity of *topology* (displaying the connections between locations). As Harry Beck observed of his revolutionary topological plan of the London Underground thirty years later, ‘Connections are the thing!’<sup>61</sup> Unlike Beck’s Underground map, though, the Postal Map accurately represented the relative positions of its nodes (the post towns).<sup>62</sup> This allowed the map to represent absolute distances accurately, which was essential for postal planning. Later versions of the postal map showed the coordinate grid lines, and also included annotations with the true travel distances next to each simplified straight-line connection; the latter combined the clarity of the straight-line format with the necessary information to infer journey times.

## PROJECTING THE ROAD

In the first topological China postal map from 1903, Tengyue appeared as a terminal node, and no postal connections were shown to the west of Tengyue.<sup>63</sup> Four years later, in the 1907 edition, the road to Burma appeared as a neatly ruled courier line, marked ‘去緬甸’ [to Burma] (Fig. 2). In the wake of the Yunnan Company’s failed railway scheme, the Tengyue-Bhamo road had been improved instead. On the Customs map, the road projected outwards from China towards Burma; in reality, the road improvements projected from Burma into China, and were a projection of the shared geographical understandings of British officials and the Maritime Customs.

The idea to improve the road at what one British consul, Archibald Rose, called ‘the most inaccessible circuit of this remote province of the [Qing] Empire’ originated not with the British government but with Halliday’s Yunnan Company.<sup>64</sup> Even before it had begun commercial operations, the Company wrote to the Foreign Office in 1899 urging that ‘the construction of a cart

<sup>61</sup> J. Hadlaw, ‘The London Underground Map: Imagining Modern Time and Space’, *Design Issues*, 19.1 (2003), 32.

<sup>62</sup> In the Underground map, not only the tube routes but also the stations themselves are represented topologically. D. L. Pike, ‘Modernist Space and the Transformation of Underground London’, in *Imagined Londons*, ed. by P. K. Gilbert (SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 101–20; K. Erickson, ‘Topological London’, in *Regional Aesthetics: Mapping UK Media Cultures*, ed. by I. Franklin, H. Chignell, and K. Skoog (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), pp. 105–21.

<sup>63</sup> ‘China: Postal Working Map’ (Shanghai: Oriental Press, 1903).

<sup>64</sup> A. Rose, ‘Report of a Journey into the Opium Districts of South-West Yunnan’, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 4967: *Reports Respecting the Opium Question in China*, 1909, pp. 35–38.

road from Bhamo to Tengue [*sic*] would lessen the cost of transport considerably, and, needless to say, trade would increase as the goods were cheapened.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the Yunnan Company was contemptuous about the sustainability of the road if it was under Chinese control:

the Chinese government expend no money for the construction or up-keep of roads, and it is unlikely they would do so in this instance, even if they gave permission for the road to be constructed... The Chinese Government spend no money whatsoever, either in the upkeep of old roads or the construction of new ones in Yunnan... exceedingly little attention is ever given to the roads.<sup>66</sup>

British officials in Tengyue generally shared the Yunnan Company's doubts about Chinese road construction. 'A Chinese main road,' wrote H. A. Ottewill, British Consul at Tengyue, 'is a piece of paving stone about 15 inches broad by about 2 feet long, and once laid down it remains good for ten years and bad for a thousand.'<sup>67</sup> Carey of the Maritime Customs provided a more down-to-earth explanation. 'Good roads are sadly needed in Yunnan, but road-making under official supervision would mean heavy taxes on the inhabitants and passing traders, and of the two evils the people at present prefer bad roads.'<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the most enthusiastic denunciation came from another member of the Maritime Customs, E. B. Howell, Assistant in Charge at Tengyue:

If the Chinese roads are the worst in the world, there are no roads in China so bad as those of Yunnan. The natural configuration of the country... would render road construction a matter of great difficulty, even if the skill and knowledge of modern science were available. When, however, the making of the roads over such a country was consummated presumably during the Age of the Five Rulers, and the mending of them is only undertaken by the private organization of the patient but penurious sufferers who are condemned to use them habitually, one can understand the miracle of inefficiency to which they are now reduced, and can sympathise with the explosion of profanity that invariably characterises any attempt which the modern European traveler may make to deal with the subject in print.<sup>69</sup>

Instead, the Maritime Customs cooperated with the British authorities in Burma to improve the Tengyue-Bhamo road. By 1904 the Burmese stretch had been upgraded to a mule road, and the surface also extended for seventeen miles into China.<sup>70</sup> The British authorities secured an additional advantage from the arrangement: the Indian Survey was given access to the Chinese part of the route, resulting in the production of a map of the road from Tengyue to the border which was held by the British Director of Military Operations and classified 'Secret'.<sup>71</sup> The road was controversial in other ways too. In 1906, a Tengyue-Bhamo railway was pronounced viable by an Indian survey team, but only between Tengyue and the Irrawaddy, since the topography would have made an

<sup>65</sup> H. Lyon Scott, 'Extracts from Mr H. Lyon Scott's Report [Yunnan Company]', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 93: *Correspondence Respecting Affairs of China*, 1900, pp. 268-276.

<sup>66</sup> H. Lyon Scott, p. 273.

<sup>67</sup> H. A. Ottewill, *China. Report for the Year 1905 on the Trade of Teng Yueh* (London: HMSO, June 1906), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Fred Carey in 'Exploration in Western China: Discussion', p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> *Decennial Reports, 1902-1911*, vol. 2, pp. 308-9.

<sup>70</sup> George Litton, *China. Report for the Year 1904 on the Trade of Teng Yueh.*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 2236-79, p. 4; 'Burma-China Frontier: The Bhamo-Tengyueh Road', File 51/1912 Pt 6, 1904, British Library India Office, IOR L/PS/10/208/1.

<sup>71</sup> 'BL IOR/W/L/PS/21/F69/1 Route Map Bhamo to Tengyueh (Momein)', 1907.

extension to Dali prohibitively expensive.<sup>72</sup> From this point, foreign officials in the area wrote less about road improvements and pushed harder for the railway instead, now envisaged not as part of a transcontinental railway scheme but as a purely local measure.<sup>73</sup>

The first person to photograph the new road in any detail was Albert Pichon of the Maritime Customs, who traveled to Tengyue in 1908, arriving at his post via the Irrawaddy and the Bhamo road. Pichon had begun his career in the Maritime Customs as Fourth Assistant in Tianjin in 1898.<sup>74</sup> He took the unassuming Chinese name 畢尙 Bishang, and was posted to Tengyue between 1908 and 1910.<sup>75</sup> During his short tenure at Tengyue, Pichon secured a promotion from third to second assistant, serving briefly as Assistant-in-charge in 1909.<sup>76</sup> Pichon enjoyed Tengyue sufficiently to accept another Yunnan posting, this time in Mengzi, around 1912 before resigning around the start of the First World War. He returned to the Mengzi Customs in 1918, and he eventually rose to serve as Commissioner from 1924, notably at Xiamen (Amoy) from 1927 to 1929. Though Pichon worked in several French-dominated ports, including Mengzi and Beihai, he was also sent to British-dominated Wuhu (and Tengyue), and was sufficiently anglicized to be mistaken for a Briton when examining a ship at Xiamen in pursuit of the Indonesian anti-colonialist Tan Malaka.<sup>77</sup> When Frederick Maze took over as Inspector General in 1929, Pichon's old boss from Tengyue appointed him to several lower-profile ports as Commissioner first in Beihai (Pakhoi) near the Indochina border, and then in Lapa (Wanzai) adjacent to Macau.<sup>78</sup> Pichon retired in 1933.

[Fig. 3 near here]

Fig. 3. Albert Pichon in Burma and Yunnan: dots indicate locations photographed, MS 15/6/22. Base map: ESRI.

Pichon compiled a photographic travelogue of the final part of his journey, a linear chronological account of Pichon's journey from Mandalay to Tengyue, and sent the finished volume of 133 chronologically ordered positives to Sir Robert Hart in February 1909, a few months after

<sup>72</sup> 'Sketch Map Showing Proposed Bhamo-Tengyueh Railway', 1906, TNA, FO 371/29/2 f27 and FO 371/29 *passim*.

<sup>73</sup> *Decennial Reports, 1902-1911*, p. 309.

<sup>74</sup> 'Movements in the Service, 1 June - 31 August 1898', *Customs Gazette*, 1898, p. 198.

<sup>75</sup> A. Rose, *China. Report for the Year 1908 on the Trade of Teng Yueh* (London: HMSO, 1909).

<sup>76</sup> *Customs Service: Officers in Charge, 1859-1921* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1926).

<sup>77</sup> Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail* (Ohio University Press, 2017), pp. 156, 279n9.

<sup>78</sup> *Customs Service: Officers in Charge, 1921-35* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1936).

Hart effectively retired as Inspector-General of the Imperial Maritime Customs.<sup>79</sup> Pichon photographed his journey attentively, particularly the road section between Bhamo and Tengyue, but he provided only short captions and no text. Albert may have had in mind his father Louis 1893 account of his trip to the Gejiu mines; like his father, Albert documented his journey in a straightforward yet meticulous way, and the set was one example of the adaptation into photographic form of the well-established genre of the explorer travelogue, which often fused the personal with the public: ‘in the nineteenth century, travel writing might often be produced by missionaries, explorers, scientists, or Orientalists... in texts in which the purveying of privileged knowledge was a central concern... [and which were] detailed [and] realistic.’<sup>80</sup> Just like a textual travelogue, the Pichon Tengyue travelogue shares ‘privileged knowledge’ in a familiar, structured way. In this sense the photographs operated as a source of knowledge and information, throwing light on the emerging use of photography as a tool for documenting geography and space, alongside more traditional tools like maps and text.

Pichon’s photographs straddle the territory between private and official. They had no formal official intent, but they can be seen as part of what we might call the ‘para-imperial archive’, the private but not wholly personal collections of Western officials.<sup>81</sup> Such photography could be suffused with the visualities and preoccupations of empire without being wholly part of the particular ‘photography complex’ identified by James Hevia, in which photographic practice, production and dissemination all follow official channels.<sup>82</sup>

## THE TOPOLOGY OF THE FRONTIER

Pichon’s photographs are markedly different from many of those produced by other foreign officers in Yunnan. Several of his Maritime Customs contemporaries were interested in ethnographic photography, notably F. W. Carey and A. G. W. Granzella at Simao.<sup>83</sup> Despite Tengyue’s famously diverse population, Pichon included just four ethnographic photographs of this

<sup>79</sup> A. Pichon, ‘Tengyueh’, Queen’s University Belfast, MS 15/6/22. The front of the album is embossed ‘Tengyueh’ and a note is written on a card in the album, suggesting that this may have been just one of a number of presentation copies of the photographs. The card reads ‘To Sir Robert Hart, Bart., G.C.M.G., from Albert Pichon. Tengyueh, February 1909’, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> H. Carr, ‘Modernism and Travel (1880-1940)’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 74.

<sup>81</sup> A. De Angeli and E. Reisz, ‘Introduction: New Lenses on China. A Symposium on Foreign Influences and China’s Photographic Frontiers’, *Chinese Historical Review*, 25.2 (2018).

<sup>82</sup> J. Hevia, ‘The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer-Era China (1900/1901), Making Civilization’, in *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Rosalind C Morris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 79–119.

<sup>83</sup> On Carey see Hillier. Also compare A. G. D. Granzella, ‘Szemao’, 1903, Queen’s University Belfast, MS 15/6/11F.

type at the end.<sup>84</sup> Pichon also avoided many of the usual subjects preferred by travel or expedition photographers, such as the plant hunter George Forrest, whose photographs from Tengyue included village scenes and dramatic vistas.<sup>85</sup> Pichon's travel photography, particularly during the overland section, was photography of *the act of travelling*. Even that is not quite right, since the experience of travel, its discomforts and surprises, is not prominent either. The photographs of the frontier section of the route are photographs not of being on the road, but for the most part *of the road itself*. He not only photographed the route; he photographed the road surface with the enthusiasm of a transportation engineer (figs. 4-6). Pichon's dogged pursuit of his theme might suggest a lack of imagination, were it not for hints of whimsy like the inclusion of the photographer's shadow (fig. 7) and the view from the luggage pile (fig. 6). The obvious conclusion is that Pichon selected his narrow theme deliberately.<sup>86</sup> Pichon's deviations from it were to photograph the staff and more often the buildings and organization of the Maritime Customs, often including the road as well (fig. 7).

[Fig. 4 near here; can arrange figs 4-7 on one page to save space, say as 4 6 [top]/ 5 7[bottom] ]

Fig. 4, 'After leaving Mamouk [Momauk]', Queen's University Belfast, Special Collections, MS 15/6/22/010/3

[Fig. 5 near here]

Fig. 5, 'The end of the carriage-road 18th mile', Queen's University Belfast, Special Collections, MS 15/6/22/010/4

[Fig. 6 near here]

Fig. 6, 'Through a steep gulley', Queen's University Belfast, Special Collections, MS

<sup>84</sup> Queen's University Belfast, MSS 15/6/22/039/1-4.

<sup>85</sup> G. Forrest, 'Journey on the Upper Salwen, October-December 1905', *Geographical Journal*, 32 (1908), 239-66.

<sup>86</sup> This route was not particularly familiar within the Customs Service. A 1902 pamphlet foresaw only the Red River route to Yunnan and did not consider the journey to the new customs house at Tengyue: J. Rousse, *Memorandum Concerning Journey, Etc., for Customs Employes Going from Hongkong to Hokow, Mengtsz, and Szemao* (Szemao: Chinese Maritime Customs, 1902).



15/6/22/13/004

[Fig. 7 near here]

Fig. 7, 'Manhsien [Manxian] Customs barrier: 4th stage', Queen's University Belfast, Special Collections, MS 15/6/22/014/2

Pichon's multiple photographs of the overland journey both emphasize the hundred-kilometer journey and negate it. The unifying theme of the road provides visual continuity between Bhamo and Tengyue, and despite the variations in the road service between the Burmese and Chinese sides, it would be easy to assume that the distance was far shorter. The relationship between a port and its *hinterland* can be defined as 'the spatial relationship between a central place, such as a port city involved in maritime trade, and areas immediately contiguous'.<sup>87</sup> Tengyue, however, was less a 'central place' than a stop on the road, and rather than a hinterland, it had a web of connections. For the Maritime Customs officer E. B. Howell, Tengyue 'can only be considered as a stage on the journey... it is but a link in the chain that connects British India to West China.'<sup>88</sup>

In his account of botanists in early twentieth century Yunnan, Erik Mueggler describes the 'paper road' along which the environment and biota of China's western frontier were transformed into knowledge for Western consumption. On this journey, paper was more than a metaphor or an abstraction; the material itself was tangible, desirable and indispensable, required for the production of scholarly and archival materials, whether these were texts, images or specimens - or photographic prints. Mueggler explores how 'transcendent imagining and minutely particular engagement... make the earth into a social being for us. They bring it to life and weave it into our relations with others.'<sup>89</sup> For Robert Hart's customs officers, however, Western Yunnan could present a very different prospect. Some, such as F. W. Carey, came to see Yunnan as Mueggler's botanists did, rich in ethnographic and ecological specificity. But they came seeking in Yunnan not a 'place of pure vision' - not a place at all, really - but rather a borderland, a crossroads between China and South Asia. For foreign officials, the road between Yunnan and Burma was not 'paper' but dotted: dotted onto their maps; dotted with features of interest to the foreign powers in among long stretches which were not; dotted as a projection of possibility, of roads and railways which might exist in a hypothesized future. The road itself was a projection of foreign power, and also of a vision of transnational interconnection and trade built into the landscape of Yunnan.

Newly arrived in Yunnan, Pichon's vision of the road was shaped by multiple geographical

<sup>87</sup> Mizushima, Souza, and Flynn, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Decennial Reports, 1902-1911*, vol. 2, pp. 303, 304.

<sup>89</sup> Mueggler, p. 35.

imaginaries which emphasized networks. Perhaps Pichon's first intervention into the public life of foreigners in China had been to draw the map for his father of the route from Indochina into Yunnan. As an officer in Hart's Maritime Customs, his geographical perceptions were shaped by the lines and dots, the edges and nodes, of the Postal Map, and by the experience of regularly moving posts, often travelling vast distances. Pichon's photography positioned Tengyue less as a city, or even as a frontier city, than as a *frontier*, understood primarily through the transnational route which passed through it. 'The Maritime Customs cannot be expected,' the British concluded, 'to maintain outstations along a frontier 200 to 300 miles long... If they [merchants] wish to avail themselves of the privileges of the foreign custom-house they must travel by the routes selected [i.e. the roads converging on Tengyue]'.<sup>90</sup> In a very practical sense, the border, at least for foreigners, stretched out from Tengyue to Bhamo and along the road between them.

Pichon's Qing employers also perceived Yunnan as a frontier. Perhaps a little mischievously, Giersch suggests that 'Frederick Jackson Turner's infamous definition of the frontier as the "meeting point between savagery and civilization" would have resonated with Qing officials'.<sup>91</sup> Pichon arrived at Tengyue at a turbulent time, when Qing officials were under instructions to eliminate Yunnan's opium crop. When the administrator of the Tengyue \*ting\* (subprefecture) attempted to carry out these orders in April 1909, 'he was shot at, his chair was wrecked, and he narrowly escaped with his life at the hands of the Kachin tribesmen from the hills', leaving the population 'angry and unsettled'.<sup>92</sup> Giersch proposes an alternative to Turner's definition of the frontier: as 'a zone in which multiple peoples meet; at least one group is intrusive, the others indigenous', and where 'far beneath the grand machinations of great men, there were indigenous leaders, soldiers, farmers, merchants, miners, and petty officials - intrusive *and* indigenous... who lived on the frontier. And it was they who actually traded, fought, negotiated and intermarried with each other.'<sup>93</sup> Pichon, doubly 'intrusive' as both a Westerner and a Qing servant was just such a 'petty official'. Pichon's photographs of the road and of Maritime Customs buildings even have certain echoes of the traditions of Qing geographies, which often privileged narrative over topographical representation, and emphasized 'roads and waterways' along with 'concrete administrative concerns [including] buildings and walls'.<sup>94</sup>

Tellingly, when Pichon did, like so many other foreigners in Yunnan, develop an interest in

<sup>90</sup> J. W. Jamieson to H. O. Bax-Ironside, 'Acting Consul Jamieson to Mr. Bax-Ironside, Tengyueh {Momein}', 15 August 1899, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 93: *Correspondence Respecting Affairs of China*, 1900, pp. 390.

<sup>91</sup> C. P. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Rose, 'Opium Districts', p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Giersch, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. Smith, *Mapping China and Managing the World: Culture, Cartography and Cosmology in Late Imperial Times* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 54–55.

natural history, it was ornithology, and in this, too, Pichon was interested in connections between Tengyue and Burma. His ornithological collection of 169 stuffed birds from 101 different species was later deposited with the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.<sup>95</sup> The ornithologists who recorded the collection noted that they had incorporated into their research ‘many biological observations made by Mr. A. Pichon.’<sup>96</sup> Pichon stated that the birds were ‘killed between November 1908 and April 1910 in the region of Tengyueh-Ting (Momein), a locality in the southwest of Yunnan, at an altitude of 1,800 meters, right at the Burmese frontier, near to Bhamo-Miytchina [Myitkyina], where the Chinese Customs is located’, and ‘the birds are closer to the Palearctic [Himalayan] fauna than those of the Far East.’<sup>97</sup> Birds must have been an appealing subject for Pichon, since they were the one type of creature which could move easily around western Yunnan’s uncompromising landscape; for birds, the road from Bhamo to Tengyue was as effortless as it must have seemed to ‘people in England, glancing at a map’.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Pichon’s volume can be understood in purely private terms, as a curiosity intended to interest a former patron, giving a sense of tangibility to Robert Hart’s lifelong project of deepening China’s global connections. But just as travelogues like Louis Pichon’s could use a personal, subjective experience to reinforce public narratives of the benefits of European colonialism, Albert Pichon’s photographic travelogue was a projection of the Maritime Customs narrative of strengthening China through consolidating its links to the world, projecting China outwards. The photographs of the road can also be seen as a ‘projection’ in a quasi-cartographic sense, visualizing a topological understanding of geography which privileged connection and networks over topography and space. Photography contributed to this topological geography by creating a synecdochical visual language through which a place could be perceived as an abstraction of itself, symbolized by a few familiar visual elements, and Pichon’s photographs used the relentless imagery of the road to reimagine Tengyue as a ‘link in the chain’, and a ‘stage on the journey’. Even as Pichon was taking the photographs, however, his understanding of Tengyue was being overtaken by events, as both the British and the Qing came under increasing pressure from both organized and spontaneous opposition.

In Western Yunnan, as in the rest of Zomia, globalizers and imperialists struggled to build the infrastructure of transnational connection amid engineering challenges and local resistance to

<sup>95</sup> J. P. Dumbacher et al., ‘Avifauna of the Gaoligong Shan Mountains of Western China: A Hotspot of Avian Species Diversity’, *Ornithological Monographs*, 70.1 (2011), 38.

<sup>96</sup> A. Ménégau and R. Didier, ‘Etude d’une Collection d’Oiseaux Recueillie Par M. A. Pichon Au Yunnan Occidental’, *Revue Française d’Ornithologie*, 3.51 (1913), 97.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Fraser, p. 236.

‘intrusive’ states.<sup>99</sup> The road itself was a kind of shadow, a projection, of bolder and unrealized imperialist dreams of a railway from Mandalay to Kunming. In 2018, that railway has yet to be built, though plans are advanced for a high-speed route to cross the border at Ruili, midway between the Tengyue and Kunlong ferry options evaluated by the Yunnan Company 120 years earlier, promoted using topological visual aids that echo the geographical imaginaries explored in this paper.<sup>100</sup> Pichon’s photographs not only capture the tangible projection of the Maritime Customs’ ambitions in Yunnan, but in so doing make manifest the topological lens through which the Maritime Customs perceived the Chinese frontier more generally: as a space to be opened, crossed and linked into wider networks.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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<sup>99</sup> J. C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>100</sup> D. Chan Sze Wan, ‘China-Myanmar High-Speed Railway Quietly Back on Track’, *The Myanmar Times*, 6 July 2018.