



Ningbo in Overseas Memories

外国档案里的宁波

Travel Guide to Dongqian Lake: The 181-Year-Old Edition



A photo of "Muh-che-yen Dam" by Edward Bangs Drew.

Dongqian Lake, nestled in the southeastern corner of Ningbo, stands as a popular destination for leisure and tourism. Its convenient proximity to Ningbo's city center has earned it the title of the city's "backyard". Renowned Chinese scholar and poet Guo Moruo (1892-1978) once praised its perfect blending of "the grace of West Lake" with "the grandeur of Taihu Lake", which has further contributed to its fame.

Dongqian Lake is a sought-after filming location for historical images of Ningbo. In 2020, local historian Shui Yin published *People and Place: The History of Dongqian Lake in Old Photos*, a book systematically cataloged both domestic and foreign photographs of the lake, creating a vast visual archive.

Despite the wealth of visual records, early Western accounts of Dongqian Lake are surprisingly scarce, with only a handful of notable figures such as William C. Milne (1815-1863), James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), Arthur Evans Moule (1836-1918), and Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) leaving behind written impressions. Some of these individuals have been featured in this column, offering valuable glimpses into the lake's past. The relative dearth of written accounts can be attributed to the fact that, during this period, Dongqian Lake was often viewed as a mere stopover en route to more prominent destinations like Tiantong Temple or the Temple of King Ashoka, rather than a standalone tourist attraction worthy of extended exploration.

Still, thanks to William C. Milne - an admirable storyteller, we can enjoy a detailed travel guide to Dongqian Lake from 181 years ago.

1 Muh-che-yen Dam: An Exciting Travel Experience

Surprisingly, the most photographed site around Dongqian Lake in early foreign photos is Muh-che-yen Dam (currently known as Mozhi Dam).

Photos of this dam before 1949, according to Shui Yin, are both the most plentiful and the earliest. Among these are two photos attributed to Edward Charles Macintosh Bowra (1841-1874) and two others to Edward Bangs Drew (1843-1924), all taken approximately between 1869 and 1871.

The collection of Shui Yin also includes several photos taken by the Frenchman Louis Rocher (1815-1900) from 1889-1891 while he worked for The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, images from Isabella Bird (1831-1904; an Englishwoman traveler and photographer), and a batch of photos from around 1903 by the French photographer René Tillot (1873-19xx). Additional photos taken before 1938 include those from naturalist Arthur de Carle Sowerby's (1885-1954) collection at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Muh-che-yen Dam, initially built during the Five Dynasties period (907-979), served both as a flood-control barrier and a navigational structure. The dam was divided into two sections: east and west. The majority of vintage photographs depicting

the iconic "boat crossing the dam" scene were captured at the east section. This area, known as "Che Yan" or the "Winch Dam", was equipped with winches on both sides, which allowed boats to be raised or lowered across the dam.

In the past, travelers from Ningbo to Dongqian Lake typically took the Zhongtang River in eastern Yin County. Upon reaching Muh-che-yen (currently known as Mozhi), they would either hire a small boat to enter the lake or continue by land along the lakeshore. For foreign visitors, boats crossing over the dam was a novel and rare sight, often considered a must-see.

Milne, an English missionary who visited the lake in May 1843, detailed the dam-crossing process in his article, *Seven Months' Residence at Ningpo*:

"At length we reached the village Muh-che-yen [on May 24th, 1843], where we found the lock or sluice that protects the north-east entrance into the Tung-tseen lake [currently known as Dongqian Lake]. The village itself looked clean, and the people behaved with wonderful decorum. While arrangements were making to hoist our boats over the sluice, we mixed with the curious crowds, and walked about the village and its neighbourhood. The most interesting scene of the hour was the hauling up of the boats. There were two inclined planes upon the dam, extending across the outlet of the lake: one for up-heaving boats from the canal below to the basin above, and the other for launching from the basin above down into the canal below." The scene is clearly visible in the above-mentioned old photos.

"The upheaving of the barge was effected by a thick rope, which embraced the boat astern, and was at both ends secured to a windlass. The windlasses, clumsy though they were, were set in motion by a number of men hired by the lock-keeper. By working the two windlasses, the one on this and the other on that side of the sluice, the boat was slowly raised to the top, whence it was launched into the basin. During the process, we had to lash every piece of furniture and baggage to prevent damage to our persons and our property; and holding on as tightly as we could ... In the launching of boats from the upper lake into the canal beneath the operation was simply to work the boat round and round gradually screwing it down the plane into the channel below."

Before the shades of evening gathered, they anchored by a village called "Ying-kia-wan".



A sketch of Dongqian Lake by Arthur Evans Moule.

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