



JTLS

Journal of Travel Literature Studies

JTLS, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2026, pp.1-18.

Print ISSN: 3135-6788; Online ISSN: 3135-6796

Journal homepage: <https://www.tlsjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/jtls26010201cpijt>



The Cartography of Prose: Inaugurating the Journal of Travel Literature Studies

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Abstract: This essay chronicles the founding of the *Journal of Travel Literature Studies*, situating the event within the grand arc of travel writing from antiquity to the present. Traversing both Eastern and Western traditions—from the riverine chronicles of Sima Qian and the arduous pilgrimages of Xu Xike to the Mediterranean wanderings of Herodotus, the Silk Road marvels of Marco Polo, the vast Islamic odysseys of Ibn Battuta, and the scientific reckonings of Humboldt, the essay contends that travel is never mere locomotion. It is, rather, a profound cultural praxis: a cartography of the self, a negotiation of identity, and an uneasy yet indispensable encounter with the Other. Born of a field that has burgeoned in significance yet languishes in institutional neglect, this inaugural statement articulates the pressing need for a dedicated scholarly forum—one capable of bridging Chinese and global intellectual currents across literature, anthropology, and cultural studies. The *Journal of Travel Literature Studies* aspires not only to accommodate methodological diversity but

Received: 25 May 2026 / Revised: 01 Aug 2026 / Accepted: 01 Sep 2026 / Published online: 15 Sep 2025 / Print published: 15 Dec 2026.

to orchestrate it, fostering cross-epistemic dialogue and charting a new territory where the itinerant and the textual converge. In so doing, it seeks to establish itself as a compass for cutting-edge scholarship, orienting the field toward its next horizons.

Keywords: Travel Literature; Anthropology of Travel; Cross-Cultural Encounter; Journal Founding

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ALAS! Vast are heaven and earth, mighty are rivers and mountains. The traces of travel and sojourn have existed since antiquity. In ancient times of China, Yu the Great¹ dredged the nine rivers and traveled through the various states; wherever his footsteps fell, civilization was illuminated. Sima Qian² journeyed south to the Yangtze and Huai rivers, ascended Kuaiji Mountain, explored the Cave of Yu, gazed upon the Nine Doubtful Mountains, floated along the Yuan and Xiang rivers, crossed the Wen

¹ Yu the Great was a legendary ruler in ancient China, famed for taming the catastrophic floods of the Yellow River. Rather than merely building dams, he pioneered a system of dredging and channeling to guide water into the sea, a colossal task said to have taken thirteen years. This herculean effort earned him the mandate to found the Xia Dynasty, traditionally regarded as China’s first. Beyond his engineering prowess, Yu epitomizes selfless dedication; legends claim he passed his home three times without entering, prioritizing his people’s welfare. He remains a paragon of virtuous, effective leadership in Chinese culture.

² Sima Qian was a seminal Chinese historian of the Han Dynasty, widely revered as the “Father of Chinese historiography.” Born around 145 BCE, he endured the humiliation of castration to complete his life’s magnum opus, the *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*. This monumental work spans over 2,000 years of Chinese history, establishing a foundational model for all subsequent dynastic histories. Unlike prior annalistic records, Sima Qian pioneered a more comprehensive, biographical format that included diverse social classes. His commitment to factual, unflinching narrative, combined with profound literary grace, established enduring standards for historical writing in East Asia.

and Si rivers in the north, and studied the legacy of Confucius in the Qi and Lu territories. Fan Zhongyan³, ascending the Yueyang Tower, beheld the vastness of Lake Dongting, where water and sky merged into one, and wind and moonlight stretched boundlessly. His ambition embraced all under heaven, and his feelings resonated through the ages. Xuan Zang⁴ journeyed west, crossing shifting sands and the Cong Mountains; over seventeen years, he visited over a hundred countries, returning to translate more than a thousand volumes of Buddhist scriptures. Over a period of more than thirty years, Xu Xiake journeyed across sixteen provinces, personally investigating and recording the topography, caverns, flora, and watercourses he encountered along the way. These examples are but a few among countless instances that attest to the pervasiveness of travel in ancient Chinese life. Far from being an exceptional pursuit reserved for the few, travel was a widespread cultural practice that permeated the intellectual traditions of successive dynasties. More significantly, these journeys were never mere physical displacements; they were, in essence, engines of knowledge production. Whether for historiographical inquiry, spiritual pilgrimage, geographical documentation, or ethical contemplation, travel served as a primary means through which Chinese scholars and thinkers generated, validated, and transmitted knowledge across generations. The journey across geographical space was inseparable from the journey of the mind, a process through which empirical observation was transformed into enduring intellectual achievement.

The Western tradition offers equally rich evidence of travel as a pervasive practice of knowledge acquisition and world-making, though the motivations and forms of

³ Fan Zhongyan (989–1052) was a prominent statesman and literary figure of China's Northern Song Dynasty. Renowned for his unwavering integrity, he rose to the position of chancellor and implemented sweeping reforms to curb corruption and revitalize the bureaucracy. As a scholar, he championed Confucian ideals, famously encapsulating his philosophy in the enduring maxim: "Be the first to bear the world's worries, and the last to enjoy its pleasures." This aphorism epitomizes his selfless dedication to public service.

⁴ Xuanzang (c. 602–664) was a renowned Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, and translator of the Tang Dynasty. Driven by a quest for unadulterated scriptures, he undertook a perilous 17-year overland journey from China to India, traversing treacherous deserts and mountains. Upon his return, he brought back over 600 Buddhist texts, which he meticulously translated into Chinese, profoundly enriching East Asian Buddhism. His detailed travelogue, the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, remains an invaluable historical and geographical resource. Xuanzang's extraordinary pilgrimage exemplifies profound spiritual dedication, scholarly rigor, and cross-cultural exchange, inspiring the classic novel *Journey to the West*.

inquiry differ in revealing ways. Herodotus⁵ of ancient Greece, setting out from Halicarnassus, sailed the Mediterranean, traversing Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, and the shores of the Black Sea. Wherever he went, he inquired about customs, recorded legends, and investigated history. His method was that of an inquirer (*historia* in Greek), and his subject was nothing less than the known world. His journey brings together many threads: the struggle between Greece and Persia, the varied terrain and traditions of the peoples he visited, and the tales and traditions he collected from local voices. Herodotus has been accused of gullibility for recording stories that stretch credibility. Yet this charge misreads his purpose: he was no mere chronicler of data, but a traveler who gave ear to the voices he encountered, a sojourner who sought to comprehend the world through the eyes of those who inhabited it. Over the course of his journeys across Europe, Asia, and Africa, Strabo⁶ observed landscapes and cities firsthand, questioned local inhabitants about their origins and customs, and assembled a comprehensive picture of the lands he visited. His travels were shaped by a conviction that such knowledge served a practical end, guiding statesmen and commanders in their governance and campaigns. His personal experience of so many regions gave his account a grounding in direct encounter, and his narrative reflects the sheer scale and variety of the world under Roman dominion.

Marco Polo traveled overland from Venice, through the Pamirs, to the capital of Kublai Khan. He spent seventeen years in the service of the Yuan court, voyaging widely through China and Southeast Asia. He returned to Europe with an intimate

⁵ Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE) was an ancient Greek historian, widely hailed as the “Father of History” for authoring *The Histories*. This seminal work chronicles the Greco-Persian Wars while weaving in extensive geographical, ethnographic, and cultural observations of the known world. Unlike purely annalistic chroniclers, Herodotus employed a systematic narrative of inquiry (*historia*), investigating causes and consequences through interviews and travel. However, his reliance on oral traditions and occasional embellishments earned him the lesser epithet “Father of Lies.” Despite such criticisms, his pioneering approach to recording human affairs established the foundational framework for Western historical writing and inquiry.

⁶ Strabo (c. 64 BCE – c. 24 CE) was a Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian from Amaseia in Pontus (modern Turkey). His monumental work, *Geographica*, is the only surviving comprehensive geographical treatise from antiquity. Spanning 17 volumes, it systematically describes the known world of the Roman Empire, blending topographical, cultural, historical, and political details. Drawing heavily from earlier sources like Eratosthenes and Poseidonius, Strabo emphasized the practical value of geography for statesmen and military leaders. While occasionally uncritical of his sources, his encyclopedic scope provides an invaluable, unparalleled window into the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions during the early Roman era.

knowledge of the East: its cities, its trade, its customs, its governance. Before Polo's journeys, Europeans possessed only vague and fragmentary notions of the lands beyond Islam; after his return, the reality of a great and prosperous civilization took shape in the European mind. His first-hand experience inspired subsequent generations of explorers, who sought to follow in his footsteps and reach the riches he had witnessed. Polo's travels proved that direct encounter could reshape a civilization's understanding of the world more powerfully than any second-hand report or philosophical conjecture. Ibn Battuta left Tangier for Mecca and never stopped moving. For forty-four years, he traveled throughout the Islamic world, reaching as far as China and personally experiencing the lands of over seventy countries. The scale of his journey rivals that of Xuan Zang in ambition and extent, a feat that earned him the title of the "greatest traveler of Islam." What distinguishes Ibn Battuta's travels is the sheer breadth of his observation. He did not merely pass through; he took note of landscapes and governance, but also of dress, cuisine, daily customs, and social life. His journeys produced a body of firsthand knowledge that spans the entire medieval Islamic world, from West Africa to Southeast Asia. He observed with a keen eye, engaged deeply with the societies he visited, and returned with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse peoples and cultures that composed the Dar al-Islam. His travels remain an unparalleled source of practical knowledge for anyone seeking to understand the world of his time.

Michel de Montaigne crossed the Alps to tour Italy, using his travels as an occasion for reflective inquiry. His observations of Italy, its customs, its architecture, and its people are always filtered through his own consciousness. The journey becomes a means of exploring the self; the encounter with the unfamiliar prompts questions about identity, belief, and human nature. Montaigne pioneered a new form of travel-based inquiry: the personal narrative that uses the journey as a mirror for the soul. His influence on subsequent travelers and thinkers, from James Boswell to contemporary practitioners of the genre, has been profound. Alexander von Humboldt sailed to South America, explored the Orinoco River, and climbed Mount Chimborazo. He viewed nature with a scientific eye and recorded his adventures in meticulous prose, bridging empirical science and humanistic reflection. His achievement was to demonstrate that

scientific observation and reflective expression are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. The journey itself functions not merely as a means of movement but as a mode of inquiry and knowledge production. His scientific training enabled him to observe, classify, and interpret unfamiliar phenomena, while direct encounters with the natural world transformed travel into a process of empirical investigation. Through firsthand observation and sustained engagement with the places and phenomena he encountered, travel became a means of generating, testing, and organizing knowledge. The result is a body of knowledge grounded in experience and observation, while remaining intellectually compelling. Charles Darwin circumnavigated the globe for five years aboard the *Beagle*, observing geology and biology along the way. His observations of geology, biology, and indigenous peoples across the globe provided the empirical evidence for his revolutionary ideas. Travel becomes a dynamic process of inquiry and knowledge production, grounded in direct observation, empirical investigation, and sustained engagement with unfamiliar environments. As Darwin encounters new landscapes, species, and human communities, travel provides not merely the physical setting for discovery but the experiential conditions through which observation is transformed into knowledge. The journey thus becomes an intellectual process in its own right: movement through unfamiliar spaces generates questions, tests assumptions, and enables the continual revision and reorganization of existing understandings. What emerges is not simply a record of discoveries, but a mode of knowledge production in which mobility, observation, comparison, and reflection are inseparably intertwined

“Writing and travel have always been intimately connected. The traveler’s tale is as old as fiction itself” (Humble and Youngs, 2002, p. 2). Travel is not merely the mechanical displacement of the body, it is an experience of dislocation and reorientation. When a traveler departs from home, he enters a realm of heightened perception, cultural dissonance, and existential questioning. The unfamiliar landscape, the strange custom, the encounter with the Other, all press upon the traveler’s consciousness with a force that cannot be ignored. Writing becomes the means by which the traveler transforms fleeting impressions into durable knowledge and

translates the foreign into the familiar for an audience that has not shared the journey. Travel writing occupies a unique position at the intersection of historiography, geography, ethnography, autobiography, and fiction, at once empirical and imaginative, documentary and poetic. This inherent hybridity makes it a particularly rich site for scholarly inquiry across literature, history, anthropology, and cultural studies.

The Chinese tradition offers enduring examples of this interdependence. Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, a foundational text of Chinese civilization, owes its intellectual breadth to his extensive travels across the Han Empire; by visiting historical sites and interviewing regional informants, he moved beyond official chronicles to produce a work that aims “to examine into all that concerns heaven and man, to penetrate the changes of the past and present, completing all as the work of one family” (qtd. Watson, 1963, p. 66). Xuan Zang's *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* emerged from his seventeen-year pilgrimage to India, meticulously documenting the geography, customs, and religious practices of over a hundred countries, a text that remains invaluable for historians and geographers. Xu Xiake's *Travels*, compiled over more than thirty years, systematically recorded landscapes, caves, plants, and river sources with empirical precision, his vivid prose capturing both factual information and aesthetic wonder. Fan Zhongyan's “Notes on the Yueyang Tower,” though born of a single ascent, transformed a localized view into an ethical meditation that articulated the Confucian ideal: “Be the first to worry about the world's problems and last to enjoy its pleasures” (Fan, 2002, p. 21). The Western tradition is equally rich. Herodotus's nine-book *Histories*, revered as the foundation of Western historiography (Luce, 2002, p. 26), weaves together the Greco-Persian Wars with geographical and ethnographic observations, bringing the exotic within reach of his Greek audience. Strabo's seventeen-volume *Geography* systematically describes the known world of the Roman Empire, blending topographical, cultural, and political details. Marco Polo's *Travels* introduced Europeans to the wealth and vastness of the Orient, heralding the Age of Discovery and inspiring Columbus and Vasco da Gama. Ibn Battuta's *Rihla*, whose pages traverse over seventy lands of the Islamic world, stands as one of the most far-reaching travel accounts ever penned.

Montaigne's *Essays* pioneered the travelogue as personal reflection, using the journey as a mirror for the soul. Humboldt's *Cosmos* and *Personal Narrative* bridged science and literature, demonstrating that scientific observation and reflective expression are mutually reinforcing. Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* served as a foundation for the theory of evolution, combining scientific rigor with vivid narrative. These works, whether historical, geographical, scientific, or philosophical, share a common origin in travel, through which their authors transformed observation into enduring intellectual achievement.

Today, the world is changing at an unprecedented pace. Advances in transportation have dramatically transformed the scale, speed, and accessibility of human mobility. Railways crisscross continents, highways connect once-distant regions, ships ply the oceans with increasing efficiency, and airplanes traverse the skies, turning journeys that once took months or even years into experiences measurable in hours. A distance of ten thousand miles can, in some cases, be covered between dawn and dusk. The Earth seems increasingly to have become one interconnected space, while international travel has evolved from a privilege enjoyed by a relatively small elite into an increasingly common feature of modern life. As people move more frequently across national, cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries, travel has become not merely an exceptional experience but an ordinary and pervasive form of human activity. This unprecedented expansion of mobility has, in turn, stimulated a remarkable flourishing of travel literature. Writers no longer confine themselves to conventional journeys of geographical discovery; instead, travel writing has expanded into an extraordinarily diverse field encompassing cultural encounters, urban exploration, ecological observation, pilgrimage, migration, exile, tourism, adventure, memory, and personal transformation. New subjects, perspectives, narrative forms, and modes of representation continue to emerge, making travel writing an increasingly heterogeneous and dynamic literary phenomenon. The proliferation of contemporary travel practices has thus provided an ever-expanding experiential foundation for literary creation, while the diversity of journeys has continually generated new possibilities for imagining places, encountering other cultures, and reflecting on the relationship between mobility,

identity, and knowledge. As is observed by Susan Bassnett “Travel writers today are producing texts for an age characterised by increasing interest in concepts of hybridity, an age in which theories of race and ethnicity, once used as means of dividing peoples, are starting to crumble under the pressure of the millions in movement around the world. Once the gaze of the traveller reflected the singularity of a dominant culture; today, the gaze is more likely to be multi-focal, reflecting the demise of a world-view that separated us from them” (Bassnett, 2002, p. 240).

Ironically, despite travel being one of humanity's most enduring and significant social practices, and despite travel literature constituting a substantial portion of literary history in both Eastern and Western traditions, the past and the present, the genre has long suffered from critical neglect. From the emergence of travel literature up until the 1970s, literary studies devoted to travel literature around the world remained remarkably scarce. The historical, geographical, religious, anthropological and other dimensions embedded in the vast body of travel writings had long been quietly appropriated by disciplines such as history, geography, religious studies, and anthropology, serving as invaluable nourishment for the development of these fields. This neglect, as Michael Kowalewski observes, stems largely from the “daunting heterogeneity” of the form—its tendency to “borrows freely from the memoir, journalism, letters, guidebooks, confessional narrative, and, most important, fiction” (1992, p. 7). Jonathan Raban puts it more caustically, describing travel literature as “notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed” (1997, p. 254), capable of accommodating everything from private diaries and essays to prose poems and polished conversation. Paul Smethurst suggests that “Travel writing studies might have continued as a marginal discipline, applied to a minor form of literature, if contemporary theory had not arrived to reinvigorate and revalue them” (2009, p. 3). John Culbert similarly observes that “The study of travel writing owes a great deal to ‘theory’ – the critical methodologies that emerged from the Frankfurt School, French structuralism, and the social movements of the 1960s and ‘70s” (2018, p. 343), while noting that theory itself has been reciprocally enriched by travel

writing's hybrid, wide-ranging perspectives on an increasingly fluid and interconnected world.

The institutional turn came in the 1980s, when an anti-traditional current swept through the humanities; as F.R. Leavis's "Great Tradition" gave way to counter-canonical strategies and new regionalisms, a vastly expanded corpus of texts came into critical view, and travel literature began its ascent from periphery to center. By the time the "theory" revolution had consolidated in the late 1980s, travel writing proved itself uniquely amenable to cross-cultural, postcolonial, gender, and globalization studies. "In social sciences such as Geography, Anthropology and Sociology, meanwhile, the recent interest in travel writing is partly a consequence of theoretical and methodological debates as to the forms of knowledge and enquiry most appropriate to each discipline" (Thompson, 2011, p. 3). The affinity with postcolonialism has been particularly close, as is observed by Claire Lindsay, "travel literature and postcolonial studies are recognized bedfellows, the first (a 'genre') a staple source for the second (a scholarly enterprise, if not a bordered discipline). Their relationship has been soldered by historical circumstances" (Lindsay, 2016, p.25). It may seem a stigma to acknowledge, but the historical entanglement between Western travel writing and colonialism is undeniable; the genre often served as an active accomplice and vanguard of colonial conquest. "The accounts of the Orient written by early Western adventurers directly stimulated the emergence of colonialism, because the East they depicted was filled with gold, jewels, spices, and silk—beneath those elegant words pulsed the desire for conquest and plunder" (Kong, 2017, p. 14). From *The Travels of Marco Polo* (1300) to Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana* (1599) to Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), travel narratives consistently exoticized China, Latin America, and Africa, constructing them as realms of fabulous wealth awaiting European appropriation. The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 marked a watershed. Said demonstrated that travel writers played a decisive role in shaping Orientalist discourse, as "The increasing influence of travel literature, imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus...But all such widening horizons had Europe firmly in the

privileged center, as main observer. . .even as Europe moved itself outwards, its sense of cultural strength was fortified. From travelers' tales, and not only from great institutions like various Indian companies, colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured" (Said, 1978, p. 117). The accumulated observations of voyagers such as James Cook, Louis Antoine de Bougainville, and Michael Adanson, together with the reports of commercial agents in the Pacific, Jesuit missionaries in China and South America, and explorers like William Dampier, produced a substantial corpus of detailed accounts pertaining to non-European peoples, customs, landscapes, and politics. Collectively, all these works that expanded people's horizons firmly placed Europe at the privileged center, positioning it as the primary observer, institutionalizing the binary oppositions of center/periphery, self/other, and civilization/barbarism that would underpin colonial ideology.

With the advocacy of anthropology, literary genetics, and postcolonial cultural studies, travel literature studies finally coalesced as a distinct discipline in the late twentieth century and reached its zenith in the early twenty-first. The founding of *Studies in Travel Writing* by Tim Youngs in 1997 proved watershed: under his stewardship, annual international conferences materialized and a flourishing corpus of papers and monographs emerged, as Youngs nurtured an intellectual community across continents and disciplines, lending institutional gravitas to a field long relegated to the margins. As Carl Thompson observes,

Travel writing studies is a burgeoning field of academic enquiry. With many societies around the world confronting complex issues of globalization, cultural hybridization and the large-scale flow of populations both within and across national borders, scholars have been increasingly impelled to historicize and theorize these and related phenomena. The rise of a 'postcolonial' agenda and methodology across many disciplines has similarly directed scholarly attention to how knowledge of other regions and societies is acquired and circulated, and the different forms of interaction and exchange that can exist between cultures. These are concerns for which travel writing past and present is a vital resource and focus.

As a consequence, a genre once viewed dismissively in the academy has in recent decades received sustained scrutiny and investigation. Indeed, it is probably now impossible to study any branch of the humanities or social sciences without at some stage being required to utilize and reflect upon travel writing in one or other of its many guises. (2016, p. xvi)

Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs concur: “Travel has recently emerged as a key theme for the humanities and social sciences, and the amount of scholarly work on travel writing has reached unprecedented levels. The academic disciplines of literature, history, geography, and anthropology have all overcome their previous reluctance to take travel writing seriously and have begun to produce a body of interdisciplinary criticism which will allow the full historical complexity of the genre to be appreciated” (Hulme and Youngs, 2002, p. 1). Today, travel is not merely the physical movement of footprints; rather, as Tian Junwu argues, it is “a complex cultural practice through which human beings construct meaning, negotiate identities, and encounter the alterity of both the world and themselves” (Tian and Lin, 2026, pp. 17–36)—a process of cultural praxis, experiential formation, and meaning-making. From an anthropological standpoint, travel constitutes an encounter with the “Other” and a concomitant reshaping of the “Self.” Every departure is an attempt to step beyond familiar boundaries; every return carries a gaze irrevocably altered by the Other. The traveler’s encounter with the Other is always a mediated one, mediated by the traveler’s own cultural presuppositions, by the textual traditions that precede the journey, and by the power relations that structure the contact zone between self and other (Tian and Lin, 2026, pp. 18–39). Travel also serves as a crucial mechanism for cultural contact, identity fluidity, and the rewriting of place. It is precisely on the journey that one continually asks: Who am I? Where is home? Where does the heart find peace? These questions are at once ancient and fresh, personal and universal. The study of travel literature has risen on the strength of this flourishing of travel. Scholars from East and West bring their own subtle insights, investigating origins, analyzing forms, examining narratives, and discerning cultural implications. Travel literature is no longer merely a catch-all term for travelogues and

journey notes; it has become an independent and substantial field of inquiry, bearing humanity's curiosity about the world, its understanding of others, and its reflection upon the self.

However, on the broader international academic stage, while the study of travel literature has gradually consolidated its presence, marked by annual conferences that proceed without interruption, a steady stream of research articles, and the continual reappraisal of canonical works, the field is served by only one dedicated scholarly journal, *Studies in Travel Writing*. To be sure, at the height of the field's expansion, *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing* was also launched in 2000 by Berghahn Books as a biannual, interdisciplinary forum meant to reflect the rich diversity of travel as both social practice and metaphor. Yet it ceased publication after Vol. 22, Issue 2 (Dec 2021), leaving *Studies in Travel Writing* as the sole specialist periodical of its kind still in circulation. This shift is noteworthy, as *Journeys* had been a key platform for scholarly dialogue across anthropology, history, and literary studies, and its absence may signal a narrowing of the dedicated publication venues in a field that had once seemed to be thriving.

Beyond its status as the sole surviving specialist periodical in the field, *Studies in Travel Writing* labors under a significant institutional handicap: it has yet to be indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) or the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI). This omission entails far more than a mere bibliographical lacuna; it carries concrete and far-reaching consequences for the journal's visibility, scholarly credibility, and long-term viability. First, the absence of indexing severely curtails the journal's discoverability within the major academic databases, rendering its contents less accessible to researchers who rely on citation indexes as their primary discovery tools. Consequently, even high-quality contributions to *Studies in Travel Writing* are less likely to be retrieved, read, and cited, which in turn depresses the journal's impact factor and perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation. This is particularly detrimental in an era when university promotion and tenure committees, as well as research evaluation exercises across many national systems, increasingly treat SSCI/A&HCI inclusion as a proxy for academic quality. Scholars may thus be dissuaded from submitting their best

work to the journal, fearing that publications there will carry insufficient institutional weight. Second, the field of travel writing studies finds itself caught in a peculiar paradox: scholarly production is abundant, and the diversity of topics, ranging from postcolonial and feminist readings to ecocritical and digital-humanities approaches, has never been richer. Yet this abundance is scattered across a disjointed landscape of monographs, edited collections, and generalist journals, with no stable, high-visibility periodical to serve as a central clearing-house. *Studies in Travel Writing*, despite its longevity and specialist focus, cannot fully fulfil this role without the gatekeeping recognition that indexing confers. The result is that scholarly exchange remains sporadic and uneven: researchers from different linguistic, national, and disciplinary traditions continue to operate within their own insulated orbits, their conversations intermittent and their cumulative efforts insufficiently synthesised. This fragmentation is especially acute in the absence of another dedicated platform that might bridge the Chinese-speaking academy and the wider Anglophone and European scholarly communities, a lacuna that is all the more regrettable given the growing global interest in travel narratives as vectors of cultural encounter and cross-cultural negotiation. Without an indexed, internationally visible venue, the field lacks the sustained, professionally rigorous forum necessary to supplant intellectual estrangement with genuine engagement, and to foster renewal through reciprocal illumination across civilisational traditions. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the establishment of a new, peer-reviewed, and preferably internationally indexed specialist journal. Only through such a recognized platform can the accumulated insights of disparate literary and cultural traditions be brought into sustained dialogue; only then can old learning and new knowledge be refined in concert, and can the achievements of Eastern and Western travel-writing scholarship be displayed upon a single, coherent stage, to the mutual enrichment of all participants in this vibrant and expanding field.

As a Chinese scholar, Professor Tian Junwu has long been engaged in the study of travel literature, a field to which he has devoted more than two decades of sustained inquiry. He has directed seven major research projects, among which the representative ones were Major Project of National Social Science Fund “A History of British Travel

Literature,” the Ministry of Education Key Project “A Study of Travel Narratives in 20th-century American Fiction,” and the Sino-American Fulbright Project “A Study of American Travel Literature.” His contributions to the international academy include over 100 SSCI, A&HCI and CSSCI-indexed articles, focusing on travel literature and its related areas. Reflecting on the trajectory of travel literature studies, Tian deems that the institutionalization of travel literature as a distinct field of inquiry has been a slow but steady process, one that requires not only the accumulation of individual research efforts but also the establishment of collective platforms for scholarly exchange and collaboration. His work testifies to a sustained engagement with the field, marked by considerable industry, a wide-ranging curiosity, careful attention to archival materials, and a habit of rigorous critical reflection. These qualities have earned him a growing readership and an increasingly visible place in the international conversation on travel literature. Sensitive to the field’s pressing need for a dedicated organ of exchange, he took the initiative to propose the founding of the *Journal of Travel Literature Studies*, a quarterly publication devoted to new work in travel literature, travel narrative, and travel anthropology. Articulating the guiding vision for the journal, Tian articulates that its guiding vision is to foster a space in which the methodological diversity of travel literature studies, ranging from formalist narratology and postcolonial critique to empirical archival research and theoretical speculation, might be brought into productive dialogue, thereby enabling the field to realize its full intellectual potential. Once established, the journal will not be constrained by narrow parochialisms, will draw no rigid distinctions between Chinese and Western traditions, and will favor neither the ancient nor the contemporary at the expense of the other. Its purview will encompass theory and empirical study, fresh reinterpretations of canonical works and incisive critiques of new publications, the written word and the visual image alike.

The establishment of this journal has received staunch support from scholars both in China and abroad. Figures such as Professor Wang Ning, Professor Nie Zhenzhao, Professor Charles Forsdick of Cambridge University, and Professor Galin Tihanov of Queen Mary University of London all believe that the rise of travel literature studies is relevant to cross-cultural understanding and the reconstruction of world literature. They

have expressed their approval and placed great hopes in the journal. Some have contributed congratulatory essays, some have agreed to submit their work, and some have recommended promising young scholars for editorial duties. They work together with one heart, never minding the toil. This atmosphere is deeply admirable and also proves that travel literature studies have coalesced into a significant academic force on a global scale. With the journal established, its aim is to integrate and connect the currents of Chinese and foreign scholarship, to link the domains of literature, anthropology, and cultural studies, and to promote the systematic and international development of travel literature research. It anticipates gathering high-level papers, each issue featuring cutting-edge topics, meticulously reviewed translations, academic debates, and book reviews, gradually becoming a major international academic hub, striving to gain its possible entry into the A&HCI index. This will allow Chinese scholars to make their voices heard more strongly in this field, and will enable scholars worldwide to more easily access Chinese travel writing and cultural experience.

Prospective contributors are invited to submit their manuscripts to the *Journal of Travel and Literary Studies (JTLS)* via the journal's official website (<https://www.tlsjournal.com>) or through the editorial email address (jtls2026@163.com). All submissions are suggested to be written in English and formatted in strict accordance with the latest MLA style guidelines. To uphold the highest standards of scholarly rigor and impartiality, the editorial board will conduct a double-anonymous peer-review process for all manuscripts that pass the initial editorial screening. This procedure ensures a fair, rigorous, and constructive evaluation, thereby maintaining the journal's commitment to publishing original, high-quality research in the field of travel writing and related literary studies. Furthermore, the editorial board warmly encourages scholars to cite articles published in *JTLS* in their own research and to recommend the journal to their institutional libraries and research networks. Broad citation and dissemination are vital not only for enhancing the journal's visibility and academic impact, including its potential inclusion in major indexing databases such as the Arts & Humanities Citation Index, but also for fostering a vibrant, interconnected scholarly community around travel and literary studies. By actively

referencing *JTLS* scholarship, researchers contribute directly to the growth of a dedicated platform that bridges diverse cultural and disciplinary traditions, amplifies emerging voices, and consolidates travel writing studies as a dynamic field of inquiry. The editorial team looks forward to seeing *JTLS* become a cornerstone of reference in the field, and we are confident that sustained scholarly engagement, through both submission and citation, will secure its place as an indispensable resource for years to come.

Alas! Though the path has not been long, the scholarly tradition has already opened. Travel knows no bounds; thought has its sources. From the scattered notes of ancient journeys to today's systematic disciplinary development, travel literature has walked a slow but long road. May scholars both at home and abroad join in this endeavor, so that the study of travel literature, like the flow of great rivers, will surge ceaselessly, and like the light of the stars and the Milky Way, will shine magnificently for all to see. I hereby record these words to mark the birth of *Journal of Travel Literature Studies*.

Funding: This article was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Grant 22&ZD288 and Grant 22BWW056.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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