

China's pristine parks get more merit

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Research, published as *How Pristine Are China's Parks?* in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, found that the numerous smaller parks in the arable farming landscapes of the warmer, wetter south and east had been more heavily modified.

In contrast the fewer, but larger parks in the pastoral livestock-herding landscapes of the colder, drier north and west were less modified.

This is believed to be the first analysis of pristineness across an entire protected area system for a large biodiverse nation.

China is gradually re-naming some of its protected areas as national parks in order to achieve greater international recognition of its conservation efforts and improve its international marketing of nature-based tourism.

Professor Ralf Buckley, International Chair in Ecotourism Research at Griffith, says information on pristineness is of value when analysing and comparing the conservation value of protected areas in China.

"China is a huge country, with high biological diversity. It also has thousands of protected areas, some very large but most quite small," he says.

"These are currently known by many different names, such as Nature Reserves and Forest Parks. China is currently proposing some of them as National Parks, IUCN-Category-II protected areas in international

terminology.

"Previous studies have documented biodiversity and park management practices. This new study measures how much, or how little, parks have been affected by human impact and infrastructure.

"The differences are considerable. The most pristine large areas are in Tibet and neighbouring provinces."

Minimal human modification is one criterion for recognition as an IUCN II reserve, and this study will be useful in achieving such recognition.

Provided by Griffith University

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