

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ  
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 437

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Mt. Taishan

Location : Province of Shandong

State Party : China

Date : December 29, 1986

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, III, IV, V and VI.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

The natural site of Mount Tai (or Taishan, alt. 1524 m) is one of the foremost cultural properties in both China and the world. Settled by humans as early as the neolithic era (the Dawenkou site is nearby), the mountain was worshipped throughout more than three millennia.

In 219 B.C., Qin Shi Huang travelled to the summit of Taishan to hold a ceremony in homage to Heaven and Earth, thus re-enacting a ritual that, according to Guan Zhong, 72 emperors and kings had carried out before him. The practice was continued up to modern times. Mount Taishan is a memorial whose history spans the ages of imperial China: from the Shang dynasty (17th-11th century B.C.) up to the Qing dynasty (1644-1912).

This form of state religion was undoubtedly preceded and shaped by an ancient cult devotion. In the first Chinese literary work, the Shijing, an anthology compiled between the 11th and 5th centuries B.C., it is written, "Mount Taishan, with perilous cliffs and peaks, was revered by the people".

That this local and spontaneous cult became the official rite of the Empire is due to the many philosophic, political and religious justifications advanced with respect to it. The doctrine of Five Elements, which appeared in the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.), propounded the theory that the universe had been composed from five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. This system of thought, incorporated into Confucianism and later Taoism, was in large part reproduced in numerous other systems. Under the emperor Wu Di of the Han dynasty, the doctrine of Five Mountains became official and symbolically represented the Empire. During the reign of Xuan Di, Mount Tai began to be known as the East mountain, with mounts Hua, Huo, Heng and Song being respectively the West, South, North

and Central mountains. Unlike South mountain, whose cult was transferred elsewhere, Mount Tai was considered the most venerable of the five peaks and remained the place of worship for a faithful cult. It was called "the King equal to Heaven" and the "Holy Emperor", names undoubtedly inspired by the imperial religion. In the god of Taishan the people saw the supreme controller of the universe, the guarantor of harmony in Heaven and on Earth, a god capable of warding off earthquakes and diverting floods.

For more than two thousand years, the various State, official and popular religious cults were instrumental in changing the landscape of the East Peak, one of the sacred places the most impregnated with history on the face of this planet. The enormous concentration of cultural properties resulting from this extraordinary heritage defies any attempt at inventory. ICOMOS shall limit itself to noting that Mount Taishan satisfies all six criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

- Criterion I. The landscape of the East Peak, one of the five sacred mountains in traditional China, is a unique artistic achievement. The eleven gates, the fourteen archways, the fourteen kiosks and the four pavilions which are scattered along the flight of 6,660 steps that rise between heaven and earth are not just simple architectural achievements but are the final touches by human hands to the elements of a splendid natural site. Its very size places this scenic landscape, which has evolved over a period of two thousand years, among the most grandiose human achievements of all time. The great number of scenic viewpoints, the variety of colours and plastic effects, and the range of emotions it elicits combine to make it one of the most complete and exquisite aesthetic accomplishments in the world.

Illustrative of the supreme harmony that has been attained here between the works of nature and of man is the Temple to the God of Taishan. This key monument integrates in one symbolic entity the city and the mountain, where magnificent, gnarled and twisted, 2100 year-old cypresses from the Han dynasty stand alongside delicately wrought structures of terraces and pagodas.

- Criterion II. Mount Taishan, the most venerated of mountains in China, exerted for 2000 years multiple and wide-ranging influences on the development of art. The Temple to the God of Taishan and the Azure Cloud Temple, dedicated to his daughter the Goddess Laomu, were prototypes built on the East Peak and subsequently used as models, during the imperial period, throughout all of China. Even greater influence was exerted by the landscape painters in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The conceptual model of a mountain bearing the traces of man, where graceful structures - bridges, gateways or pavilions - contrast with somber pine forests or frightening rocky cliffs, could only have originated by referring to Mount Taishan. The tradition of depicting

mountainous landscapes persisted in China through the Mongolian dynasty, with Chao Meng-Fu and Chao Huan. It flourished anew under the Ming with Li Tsai and Yen Wen-kuei. Later, in the very beginning of the Qing period, Wang-Hui (1632-1717) reconciled in his work all the styles of Chinese landscapes, the classified forms of the mountain inspiring in turn a whole aesthetic system. In the 18th century, the West began to create "Chinese gardens" which comprised cliffs, cascades, bridges and pagodas and were no more than smaller, trite images of the grandiose structures of Mount Tai.

- Criterion III. Mount Taishan bears unique testimony to the lost civilizations of imperial China, most particularly as concerns their religions, arts and letters. For two thousand years it was one of the principal places of worship where the emperor paid homage to Heaven and Earth in the Fengshan sacrifices, conducted by the Son of Heaven himself. Since the time of the Han dynasty, it has been one of the five mountains symbolizing the Celestial Kingdom, in accordance with the Doctrine of Five Elements, a fundamental premise in Chinese thought. At the same time, it was an important religious shrine for the people. Innumerable poems and narratives tell of the millions of pilgrims from the remotest areas of the country attracted by the Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian temples and local religions. The source of inspiration for hermits, emperors and ministers, for philosophers, poets and painters, Mount Taishan is in itself an extraordinary open-air museum where one can see the commemorative or votive monuments erected in the vicinity of the temples and palaces or in the solitude of a valley, or scan the more than one thousand inscriptions that have been carved or painted onto its flanks, including such religious texts as the Buddhist Sutra of the Diamond, and lay writings like "An Essay on Mount Taishan" composed by the emperor Xuanzong in 726.

- Criterion IV. Other than its overall typological value as a sacred mountain, Mount Taishan provides a finished model for a certain number of buildings erected in ancient China. The Palace of Heavenly Blessings (1008), which is located inside the Temple to the God of Taishan, is one of the three oldest palaces in China. It houses a masterpiece of Taoist painting, dated 1009, entitled "The God of Taishan Making a Journey" (3.33 m x 62 m). Also constructed under the Song, the Azure Cloud Temple is typical of a mountain architectural complex by the arrangement of its courtyards and buildings. In the area of Buddhist architecture, the Divine Rock Temple, whose Thousand Buddhas Hall contains the marvelous painted Arhat statues and where a unique set of dagobas of illustrious Buddhist monks is located, is also an outstanding and complete example of a great temple. It replaced a temple on the same site which Li Jipu, the prime minister of the emperor Dezong (Tang dynasty) declared was one of the four major temples in China.

- Criterion V. The natural and cultural ensemble of Mount Tai comprises a traditional human settlement which has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

- Criterion VI. Mount Tai is directly and tangibly associated with events whose importance in universal history cannot be minimized, i.e. the emergence of Confucianism, the unification of China, and the appearance of writing and literature in China. It was here that Confucius (c. 555 - c. 479 B.C.) became conscious of the smallness of the world. This is the place where Qin Shi Huang proclaimed in a famous inscription the unity of his empire. This was where the new calligraphy which that same emperor had imposed was illustrated by two inscriptions at the Temple to the God of Taishan - one was painted in 219 B.C., under the reign of Qin Shi Huang, the other was executed on the order of his son, Hua Hai. Both of them were painted by the prime minister Li Si and figure among the incunabula of Chinese calligraphy, an integral part of one of the most ancient and most beautiful bodies of literature in the world.

Without modifying the globally positive appreciation that Mount Tai merits on the basis of these various criteria of excellence, ICOMOS shall limit itself to expressing the wish that the request of cooperation made to UNESCO by the People's Republic of China for the management of this outstanding site may provide an opportunity for a thorough revision of the principles of management of the site adopted prior to the law of 7 June 1985.

Indeed, neither the high-rise concrete buildings in the vicinity of the Temple to the God of Taishan at Tai'an, nor the cable-car link between the Heavenly Middle Gate and the highest point of the mountain can be considered compatible with the aesthetic, historic and symbolic value of this unique cultural property.

ICOMOS, May 1987