

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The ancient building complex in the Wudang Mountains
<i>Location</i>	Danjiangkou City, Hubei Province
<i>State Party</i>	People's Republic of China
<i>Date</i>	26 October 1993

**Justification by State Party**

The ancient buildings in the Wudang Mountains are scattered, but the location of the Golden Shrine on the main peak in the centre of the range suggests a hierarchy. Topographical features and landscape were used so as to achieve harmony between the buildings and the environment. The complex is a masterpiece of ingenious planning, design, and architecture.

Various styles, methods of construction, and materials were used in the buildings. They show the high achievement of the Chinese people in technology and art.

The involvement of the emperors of the Ming Dynasty in the planning and design of the buildings contributed to their high quality. The exquisite nature of the structures, the lavishness of the decoration, and the large number of statues of deities combine to make this an outstanding example of ancient Chinese architecture.

The Golden Shrine and the statues within it were made from large cast components. The lost wax casting and the gilding techniques used represent the pinnacle of science and technology of the period.

The complex testifies to the fact that Zhu Di achieved the throne by force of arms. He made use of Taoism to propagate the idea that the Imperial power was granted by God in order to counteract the popular view of the time that he had secured it illegally. By so doing he assisted the Taoist religion to secure a place in the minds of the masses. For this reason the complex is of great historical, ideological, and historical significance.

**History and Description***History*

Work began on the buildings in the Wudang Mountains in the early Tang Dynasty, in AD 627-49. To commemorate the success of Yiao Jian, Governor of the Wudang Administrative Region, in bringing rain by prayer, the Emperor Taizong ordered the Five Dragon Hall to be built. This was quickly followed by the Taiyi and Yanchang Temples, and in 869 the Weiwu Gong Temple (Temple of the Powerful Duke) was built. In 1018 the Song Emperor Zhenzong converted the Five Dragon Hall into a temple, and his successor Huizong had the Purple Heaven Hall built beneath the Zhanqi Peak. Then came the Laojun Monastery and the Xianguan Terrace.

The Yuan Emperors relied on Taoism for support, and so the Emperor Shizu extended the Five Dragon Temple and made it into a palace. The Emperor Renzong, whose birthday was that of the god Zhenwu, gave a commemorative plaque to the building designed to give the impression that he was the god in disguise. In 1304 the mountains became known as "The Blessed Land", at which time the Gate to the Blessed Land was

constructed. The Tianyi-Zhenqing Palace, the Yuxu Cliff Temple, the Thunder God's Cave, and the Yinxian Cliff Temple were also built around this time.

After his enthronement the Ming Emperor Zhu Di declared that his imperial power was granted by God, and announced that he was under the protection of the Taoist god Zhenwu. To repay the god's favour, he put his son-in-law Mu Xin, the head of the Ministry of Works Guo Jin, and the head of the Ministry of Rites Jin Chun at the head of four hundred officials charged with construction work in the Wudang Mountains. It took twenty thousand men twelve years to complete the work, which included nine palaces, nine temples, 36 monasteries, 72 cliff temples, and over a hundred stone bridges, divided into 33 groups. In 1416 he sent over three thousand prisoners to the area to work on the land to provision the Taoist monks. The local inhabitants were exempted from *corvée* labour, a large military force was stationed in the area, and workers were assigned to keep the temples and palaces clean. Renowned Taoists were summoned from all parts of the country to serve as elders at important palaces and temples. The title of "Great Mountain" was conferred on the Wudang range. All the subsequent Ming Emperors sent their favourite eunuchs to the mountain to worship and allocated funds for the upkeep of the buildings. In 1552 the Ming Emperor Shizong put Lu Jie, head of the Ministry of Works, in charge of repair work; under his leadership, a hundred officials and workmen from more than sixty counties worked for nearly two years. The Zhishi-Xuanyue Gate was set up to commemorate this work.

During the Ming Dynasty over 4000 ha of land belonged to the temples, thousand of Taoists lived in the area, and 369 Imperial edicts concerning the mountain were issued. The fame of Taoist monks from Wudang such as Zhang Shouqing, Lu Dayou, and Wang Zhen spread widely across China.

#### *Description*

The Wudang (Taihe) Mountain is located in Danjiangkou City, Hubei Province. It is in fact a series of mountain ranges some 400 km in circumference. Sky Pillar Peak, the highest at 1612 m, is surrounded by 72 lesser peaks and 24 ravines. The famous Ming Dynasty geographer Xu Xiake placed it higher than the Five Mountains for its beautiful peaks and unique scenery of caves and precipices.

The palaces and temples, which acted as nuclei for other structures, were built in valleys or on terraces, with monasteries and cliff temples clustered around them. They were distributed regularly across the landscape and linked by a network of sacred roads.

Of the vast complex that was created during the Ming Dynasty, four Taoist palaces (and three in ruins) survive, along with two temples and many monasteries and cliff temples.

The Golden Shrine is situated in the middle of a stone terrace on the top of Sky Pillar Peak. It was built in bronze, imitating wooden construction; the parts were prefabricated in Beijing and shipped via the Grand Canal to Nanjing, and thence to Wudang by the Yangtze and Hanjiang rivers for assembly. The shrine, in the form of a palace, is 4.4 m long, 3.15 m wide, and 5.54 m high, and is surrounded by columns that support the five-ridged roof with double eaves (a form only permitted on Imperial buildings). The whole structure is richly decorated and painted. Inside is a seated statue of the supreme god Zhenwu, flanked by representations of the Golden Page and the Jade Maiden.

The Ancient Bronze Shrine, on top of the Lotus Flower Peak, was made in 1307 in the same way as the Golden Shrine. The metal work of the shrine, cast in Wuchang, is the earliest anywhere in China.

The Forbidden City round the Sky Pillar Peak dates from 1419. It is surrounded by a 345 m long wall 1.8 m thick and in places 10 m high, built of dressed stone. Four wooden gates represent the Gates of Heaven.

The Purple Heaven Palace, built in 1119-26, rebuilt in 1413, and extended in 1803-20, is the largest and best preserved building complex in the Wudang Mountains. Twenty-nine buildings survive, covering 6854 m<sup>2</sup>. There are five ascending terraces on the central axis, each with its hall (Dragon and Tiger Hall, Tablet Pavilion, Shifang Hall, Purple Heaven Hall, and Parental Hall); on the sides of the halls there are pavilions and annexes used by the Taoist monks as living quarters. The main structure is the Purple Heaven Hall, 18.3 m high, 29.5 m long, and 22 m wide, built of gigantic wooden pillars and beams. The decoration is sumptuous, especially the roof, which is covered with peacock blue tiles and ornamented ridge tiles.

The Nanyang Palace, built in 1285-1310 and extended in 1312, includes 21 buildings and covers 90,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The major buildings include the Tianyi-Zhenqing Stone Hall, Liangyi Hall, Bagua Pavilion, Tiger and Dragon Hall, Grand Pavilion, and South Heavenly Gate. The Tianyi-Zhenqing Hall, the main structure, is 11 m long, 6.6 m wide, and 6 m high, built entirely in elaborately carved stone.

The Dragon Head Incense Burner, which is 3 m long but only 0.33 m wide, is a stone structure that projects over a deep valley. The farther end is carved in the form of a dragon's head in which an incense burner was placed. It is of special artistic and technological importance for its design and construction.

The Fuzhen Temple, below the Lion Peak, was built in 1412 and extended in 1683. Twenty buildings survive in the 60,000 m<sup>2</sup> enclosure. A screen wall, an incense burner, the Dragon and Tiger Hall, and the Prince's Hall are on the main axis of the complex. Associated structures are the Huanjing Hall, where Taoist holy scriptures were read aloud, a pavilion and dining hall for the monks, and the Five Clouds Building, which rises to five storeys. The layout of the compound includes open spaces of the type characteristic of southern China.

The Zhishi-Xuanyue Gateway is located at the intersection of the former Sacred Road and the main highway, 4 km east of modern Laoying, and marks the entrance to the Wudang Mountains. It is built in stone imitating wood and dates from 1522. The gate is 11.9 m high, 14.5 m wide, and divided into three sections by columns. It is ornately decorated with carved patterns of tortoises, dragons, cranes, plants, clouds, waves, and celestial beings.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The ancient building complex, which belongs to the People's Republic of China, is protected by a series of legal instruments deriving from the Constitution of the People's Republic of China; among these are the Penal Code of the People's Republic of China, the Laws on the Protection of Cultural Relics and Ruins of the People's Republic of China, and the Environmental Protection Laws of the People's Republic of China. This is comprehensive interlocking legislation with severe penalties for transgression.

Article 2 of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics states that:

The State shall place under its protection, within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China, the following cultural relics of historic, artistic, or scientific value:

- 1 Sites of ancient culture, ancient tombs, ancient architectural structures, cave temples, and stone carvings that are of historical, artistic, or scientific value;
- 5 Typical material objects reflecting the social system, social production, or life of various nationalities in different historical periods.

In accordance with this article, the Golden Shrine, the Purple Heaven Palace, and the Zhishi-Xuanyue Gateway were listed as Major Cultural Relics in 1961, 1982, and 1988 respectively. General protection was extended in 1982 to the whole region as a major zone of scenic and historical interest

In 1973 the People's Government of Junxian County promulgated a Notice on Strengthening the Administration of Cultural Relics in the Wudang Mountains, and this was reinforced by a further Notice relating to the protection of cultural relics in the area. Measures for the Administration of the Wudang Mountains Scenic and Historic Zone were issued by the People's Congress of Danjiangkou City in 1989, and in 1993 the same administration defined the protected areas and zones for control of building around the ancient monuments.

### *Management*

The complex is directly managed by the Wudang Mountains Cultural Relics Administration Centre, which was set up in 1961 and is located in Wudangshan Town, Danjiangkou City. It follows a policy of

maintaining ancient buildings in their original state without reconstruction. This agency is shortly to be upgraded so as to be able to expand its conservation work. The costs of conservation and restoration work are shared between national, provincial, and local authority budgets.

The programme for the Overall Planning of the Wudang Mountains Historic and Scenic Zone and the Implementation Measures of Hubei Province on the Administration of Cultural Relics provide for the delineation of protective belts around the sites of cultural relics, marked by posts and the progressive removal of units occupying those buildings. Preservation plans are being drawn up in consultation with experts in this field. The Central Government's policy of "repair for preservation first" has been adopted and steps are being taken to increase funding for this work. The research programme is being stepped up, to include work on protection against fire, insects, corrosion, and lightning. The monuments in the more remote parts of the area are being placed in the charge of specially designated personnel.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Efforts to carry out a systematic programme of protection and conservation of the cultural properties in the Wudang Mountains are comparatively recent. The Central Government Bureau for the Administration of Cultural Relics allocated special funds in 1953 and 1962, but only since 1980 has there been an annual allocation of 5 million yuan from the Government of Hubei Province. The Wudang Mountains Cultural Relics Administration Centre was set up by Danjiangkou City in 1961, but appears to have been under-resourced until the late 1980s.

It is admitted in the nomination dossier that some serious problems remain to be tackled. Some of the wooden buildings are in a poor state of conservation from damp; the Golden Shrine is continually menaced by lightning strikes, whilst its rock foundations are beginning to crack; a number of buildings have been erected to cater for the increasing tourist trade, which are threatening the conservation of the historic structures; and the buildings in the remoter parts of the mountains are in urgent need of first-aid measures.

### *Authenticity*

There is a high level of authenticity in the surviving buildings, most of which have not undergone major changes or repairs since the Ming Dynasty.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Wudang Mountains in May 1994. It highly commended the standard of conservation and management of the site. It did not, however, find a satisfactory answer to the questions raised by ICOMOS relating to an overall management plan, especially in respect of the conservation of the more remote properties in the complex (see below).

### *Qualities*

The buildings in the Wudang Mountains complex are of high cultural value. They are examples of religious and secular buildings closely associated with the growth of Taoism in China and lavishly endowed by successive Emperors.

### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

It is clear from the documentation provided that the Wudang Mountains complex of historic buildings is accorded a high priority for protection and conservation funding by government at national, provincial, and local level. Steps are now being taken to provide a management plan backed by adequate resources that will ensure the continued survival of these monuments. However, it would seem that this is only now being

implemented, and that much remains to be accomplished. In particular, there seems to be an urgent need to develop a plan for handling the increasingly large numbers of visitors.

The nomination dossier was unclear as to exactly what was being proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List. This was, however, clarified by a map supplied by the Chinese authorities, showing the individual monuments identified to constitute the proposed World Heritage monument, the buffer zone being the protected area of the park.

### **Recommendation**

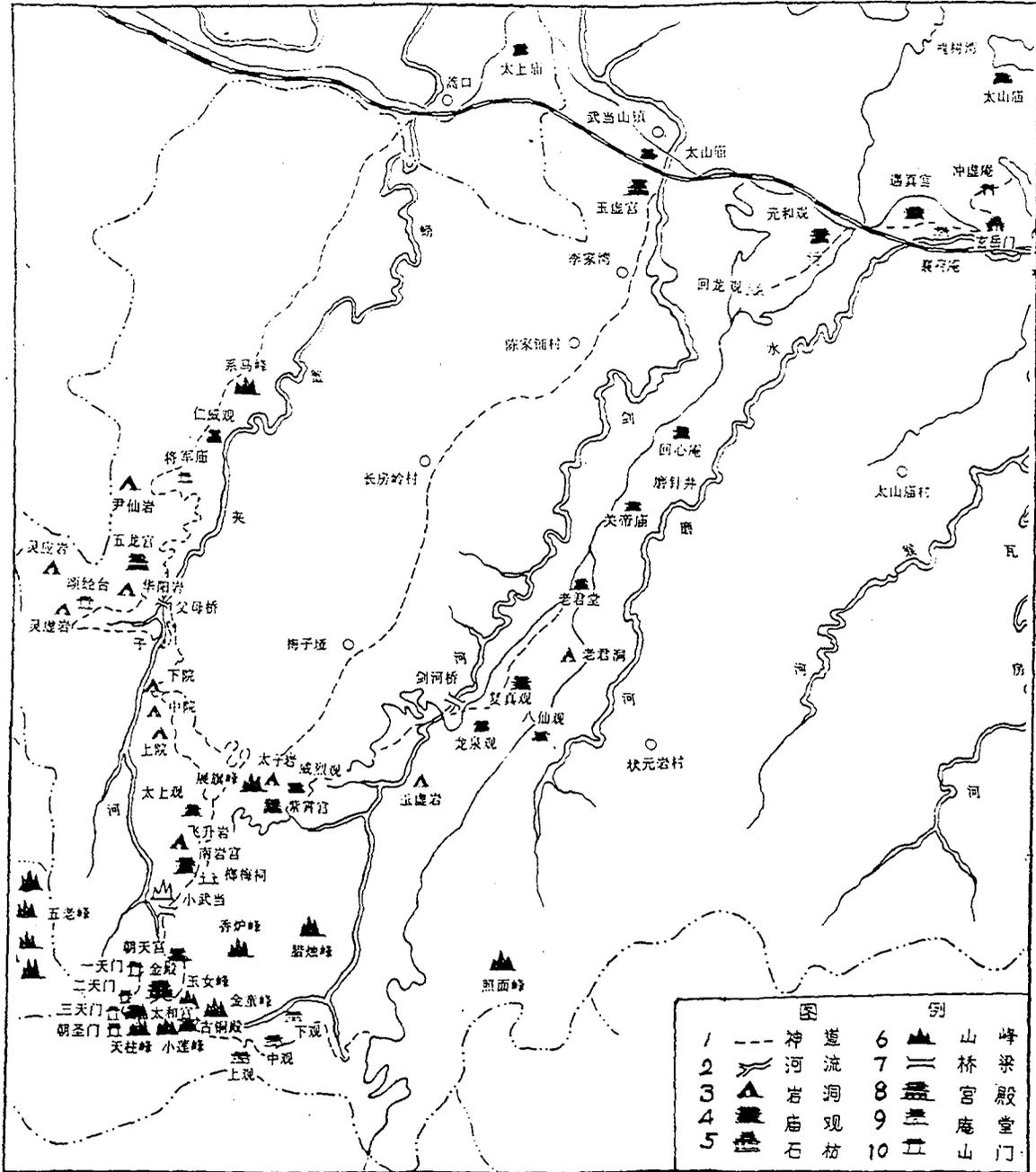
That this nomination be referred back to the State Party, requesting more detailed information about the management plan for the monuments in the Wudang Mountains and an assurance that the conservation measures be put in hand without delay at the more remote cultural properties within the nominated area. In the event of this information being supplied, ICOMOS recommends that the property be inscribed on the List on the basis of criteria i, ii, and vi:

- *Criterion i* The ancient buildings in the Wudang Mountains represent the highest standards in Chinese art and architecture over a period of nearly one thousand years.
- *Criterion ii* The Wudang buildings exercised an enormous influence on the development of religious and public art and architecture in China.
- *Criterion vi* The religious complex in the Wudang Mountains was the centre of Taoism, one of the major eastern religions and one which played a profound role in the development of belief and philosophy in the region.

ICOMOS, October 1994

Ensemble de bâtiments anciens des montagnes de Wudang :  
plan du site

Ancient building complex in the Wudang Mountains :  
map of the site



- 1. Holy Road
- 2. River
- 3. Cave
- 4. Temple
- 5. Stone Gate

- 6. Peak
- 7. Bridge
- 8. Palace
- 9. Convent
- 10. Gate to the Mountains