

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN SUMMARY

437: MOUNT TAISHAN SCENIC BEAUTY AND HISTORIC INTEREST ZONE (CHINA)

Summary prepared by IUCN (May 1987) based on the original nomination submitted by the People's Republic of China. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION:

Mt Taishan is located in central Shandong Province, just north of Tai'an City. 36°11'-36°31'N, 116°50'-117°12'E.

2. JURIDICAL DATA:

The mountain has been specifically protected throughout history, except in times of war and revolution. Protection measures culminated in the establishment of Mt Taishan as a scenic beauty and historic interest zone in 1982 by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Legal protection is afforded to the natural and historic heritages under the State's Cultural Relics Protection Law, Forest Protection Law, Interim Regulations concerning the Administration of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zones and various local regulations and administrative decrees.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

Mt Taishan rises abruptly from the vast plain of central Shandong and culminates in Jade Emperor Peak (1,545m). Geologically, it is the oldest and most important example of the paleo-metamorphic system representative of the Cambrian Period in eastern China. Referred to as the Taishan Complex, it comprises magnetised, metamorphic, sedimentary rock and an intrusive mass of various origins that were formed in the Archean Era 170-200 million years ago. Subsequently, in the Proterozoic Era, the Taishan region began to rise, becoming part of the continent by the end of the era. Uplift continued until the middle of the Cenozoic Era. The gneiss which emerged in the Taishan region is the foundation for all of North China. Cambrian strata, fully emerged in the north, are rich in fossils.

Vegetation covers 80% of the area. The flora is diverse and known to comprise 989 species, of which 433 species are woody and the rest herbaceous. Medicinal plants total 462 species. Some very old and famous trees date back many hundreds of years.

There are over 200 species of animals in addition to 122 species of birds. The red-scaled fish, found in running water at 300-800m, is widely distributed in China.

Mt Taishan has an extremely rich cultural heritage; moreover, the way in which this has been integrated with the natural scenery is considered to be a precious legacy. Cultural relics include memorial objects, ancient architectural complexes, stone sculptures and archaeological sites of outstanding importance. There are 22 temples, 97 ruins, 819 stone tablets, and 1,018 cliffside and stone inscriptions.

Mt Taishan is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, evidence of human activity dating back 400,000 years to Yiyuan Man of the Palaeolithic Period. By Neolithic times, 5,000-6,000 years ago, it had become a

significant cultural centre with two cultures flourishing, the Dawenkou to the north and the Longshan to the south of the mountain. The Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) of the Zhou Dynasty witnessed the first flare of cultural creativity with the emergence of two rival states in the area, Qi to the north and Lu to the south of the mountain. During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), the state of Qi built a 500km long wall as protection from possible invasion by the state of Chu, the ruins of which are still evident.

Mt Taishan has also been an important centre for both Buddhism and Taoism. The Divine Rock Temple is considered foremost among China's four temple wonders. The Temple to the Heavenly Queen Mother, built before the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.), is the earliest Taoist temple, while the Azure Cloud Temple is the most influential, its influence extending over more than half of China.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION

The Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection, Beijing University and the Mt Taishan Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zone Administrative Committee will jointly manage and develop the Mt Taishan zone in accordance with the Interim Regulations Concerning the Administration of Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zones issued by the State Council.

Preservation and management facilities are presently inadequate. Tourism is not controlled, and damage to scenic sites and quarrying for rocks by farmers is on the increase. The endemic red-scaled fish is on the verge of extinction due to inadequate water resources and poor management. Certain cultural relics, such as the Diamond Sutra in Sutra Rock Valley, are in urgent need of restoration.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

The Mt Taishan nomination, as presented by the Government of the People's Republic of China provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

a) Natural property

- (i) Earth's evolutionary history. Mt Taishan is the oldest and most important example of the paleo-metamorphic system in eastern China, providing a standard profile of the upper and middle series of the Cambrian period that is rich in fossils.
- (iii) Superlative natural and cultural beauty. Mt Taishan is a majestic site, its dense forests and ancient temples complementing each other.
- (iv) Habitat of rare and endangered species. The locally endemic red-scaled fish, prized as a delicacy, is on the verge of extinction.

b) Cultural property

Criteria for cultural property are being assessed by ICOMOS.

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(PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA)

1. DOCUMENTATION:

- (i) IUCN Data Sheet.
- (ii) Consultations: Ministry of Urban and Rural Reconstruction and Environmental Protection, Shandong Province and Taishan County authorities, Mt Taishan Scenic Zone, Administrative Commission and Li Wenhua.
- (iii) Documentation: Numerous publications, mainly historical.
- (iv) Site visit: May 1987 (P.H.C. Lucas).

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Mt Taishan is essentially a mixed cultural/natural site with the balance of emphasis on its cultural elements. Even the Chinese appreciation of its natural values has a strong cultural emphasis. The mix of cultural and natural elements has similarities with the Sanctuario historico de Machu Picchu (Peru) in that the strong cultural values have a greater impact because of the natural setting and it is the natural setting that led to the cultural values being expressed. A difference from Machu Picchu is that Mt Taishan remains a living cultural/natural site for the Chinese people for many of whom a pilgrimage to see the sunrise from Taishan is an essential experience and represents the essence of the most populous nation on earth.

There are some 500 scenic and historic zones designated in China at the city level, nearly 100 at the provincial level and only 44 at the national level. Of these 44, Taishan was chosen by the Ministry of Urban and Rural Reconstruction and Environmental Protection as the first priority for nomination as a World Heritage Site. The area did not appear, however, in a recent article in China Pictorial on "China's 10 Best Scenic Attractions."

Due to its lack of a clear legislative basis and mixed land uses Mt Taishan does not appear on the 1985 UN List of Protected Areas. It lies within the Oriental Deciduous Forest Biogeographical Province within which there are some 30 other protected areas in China and Japan. The national parks of Hakusan and Fuji-Hakone-Izu in Japan are of a similar type but have greater natural values and quite distinct cultural/religious attributes.

3. INTEGRITY

The nomination itself indicates weaknesses in management and damage to the natural integrity of Mt Taishan. These were confirmed by the site inspection. The establishment of a cable car to a point near the summit was clearly controversial and a case where local pressure saw development proceed in the absence of firm regulations and an effective management plan. However, it is fortunate that the 7000 steps by which the majority of visitors reach the summit are out of sight of the cable way and, for the short distance from which it is clearly visible, it may be possible to revise the walking route.

There is a mix of historic and more recent buildings, particularly near the summit. Some of the recent buildings are incongruous particularly the weather station built before the founding of the People's Republic and the Summit Guest House. The latter is scheduled for demolition and replacement with a

smaller modern building built in historic style as most of the recent buildings are. However, there needs to be a definite limit of the extent of development and control of photo and refreshment booths which line parts of the walking access and key sites such as the Middle and South Gates to Heaven and the summit area. However, there are substantial and impressive areas free of both historic and modern features such as the very impressive Rear Rocky Basin and much of the mountain has a grandeur and wilderness that belies its thousands of years of human use and its modest height of 1545 metres.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Clearly, the Chinese are not satisfied with the management of Mt Taishan and are seeking guidance and training for more effective management of the site.

The Administrative Commission's Deputy Director is to attend the 1987 Seminar on National Parks in Canada, US and Costa Rica under a World Heritage Fellowship and in 1988 a symposium is proposed for Taishan to enhance management skills.

With State and local government laws enacted in 1985 there is now a much sounder basis for protection of natural and cultural values and an improved management plan should be adopted in 1987.

Mining/quarrying in scenic areas of the zone has been prohibited and this is being enforced by the Public Security Bureau. Alternative sources of material are being opened up outside the scenic zone.

Research into the red-scaled fish is being undertaken by Shandong Agricultural University and artificial breeding is being used. To ensure its preservation in the wild, fishing has been prohibited and only field staff are permitted in the areas in which it occurs.

5. EVALUATION

Viewed solely against the criteria for natural sites, Mt Taishan does not meet any of them in an unqualified way. In terms of earth's evolutionary history and ongoing geological processes, it is significant in the context of east China. Its natural beauty is dominated by the cultural impacts of thousands of years of human use. It has no endangered species.

Nevertheless, Mt Taishan's impressive bulk and natural features have attracted reverence from the Neolithic Age 5000 to 6000 years ago. Emperor Xiangtu of the Shang Dynasty (c 16-11 century BC) established his capital at its foot and since 219 BC when Emperor Qin Shi Huang of the Qin Dynasty came to worship Heaven and Earth on Mt Taishan, emperors of many other dynasties have followed suit. Taoists, Buddhists and Confucians all regard it as sacred and the Princess of the Azure Clouds, a Taoist deity is a powerful figure for the peasant women of Shandong and beyond. Confucius climbed Mt Taishan and from it uttered the dictum "the world is small" and, although not mentioned in the nomination, it was while watching the sunrise from its summit that Mao Zedong commented "The East is red".

The visitor cannot help being impressed by the depth of history, culture and structures - some of them absolutely splendid - which are found in the scenic and historic zone and which exist solely because of the natural feature of the mountain.

The concluding section of the nomination accurately sums up the impression made by the site inspection:

"Mt Taishan contains an extremely rich cultural content which has enabled it to embody much of the spirit of Chinese history. Mt Taishan can be viewed, indeed, as the symbol and epitome of the Chinese nation. It is an imposing natural mountain, a grand landscape, it carries a lofty ideal, and it has a unique cultural history. Either before the eyes of emperors or in the mind of the humble, Mt Taishan has been seen as being sacred. The Chinese everywhere cherish and respect highly the lofty symbol of Mt Taishan and its organic blend of nature and culture. It is this process of integrating culture with nature that is a precious legacy that the Chinese have shared with the rest of mankind."

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Mount Taishan Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zone cannot be recommended for inscription on the World Heritage List on the basis of its natural values. However, it fits the concept of an exceptional association of cultural and natural elements (criteria iii) and could be inscribed on the World Heritage List recognising that its cultural values derive from and are dependent on its natural qualities. In the event that ICOMOS does not approve the site on cultural grounds, the Committee could discuss use of this criteria. This recommendation is subject, however, to the adoption of a satisfactory management plan. The Committee may wish to suggest that the following be addressed in this plan:

- The concept of adopting a carrying capacity and designing facilities on that basis be used to control access.
- Consider proposals to progressively remove or replace incongruous buildings with those of an appropriate architectural style.
- Suggest that the location, number and type of small scale photo and refreshment operations be rationalised and controlled to reduce adverse impact on visitor appreciation of natural and cultural values.
- Suggest that there be investigations into the practicability of re-routing the walking access above the Middle Gate to avoid the intrusion of the cableway and vehicle development on visitor experience.
- Ensure that a proper resource inventory of the natural feature of the site is made in order to better document the full value of the reserve.

