
WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

MOUNT EMEI AND LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA (CHINA)

Summary prepared by IUCN/WCMC (April 1996) based on the original nomination submitted by the Government of 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

Located in the Sichuan Province, the nominated area includes Mount Emei Scenic and Historical Area, west of Emeishan City, and the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, located to the south-east of Leshan City at the confluence of three rivers: Minjiang, Dadu and Qinqi. Both Scenic Areas, separated by about 40km, are linked by road and are approximately 140km south-west of Chengdu, the provincial capital, with access by highway.

2. JURIDICAL DATA

Mount Emei has been protected since the middle of the 10th century, when an agency was set up at the Baishui Temple (currently Wannian Temple) for the management and conservation of the area.

In 1982 Mount Emei Scenic Area was approved as a Place of Scenic and Historical Interest by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. It is subject to the Provisional Regulations for Administration of Scenic Areas promulgated by the State Council in 1985, the Provisional Regulations for Administration of Scenic Places in the Sichuan province promulgated by Sichuan Provincial People's Congress in 1994, and other local regulations and government decrees.

3. IDENTIFICATION

Mount Emei Scenic Area covers 15,400ha, emerging from the western margin of the Chengdu Plain with a relative height difference of 2,600m, ranging from 500m at the plains to 3,099m at the highest peak of Mount Emei. It includes a range of landscapes of undulating hills, valleys, deep gullies and high peaks.

The climate varies significantly with altitude from an annual mean of 3°C in the cold-alpine zone to 17.2°C in the subtropical zone. The site is frequently covered in dense cloud, with associated high rainfall and humidity.

Vegetation coverage of 87% of the nominated property, with five vegetation belts defined according to vertical zonation. These range from subtropical evergreen broadleaf forests in the lowest part to subalpine shrubs above 2,800m. Some 3,200 plants species have been recorded, including a number of local endemics, and included ornamental, medicinal and edible plants of economic or scientific value.

The fauna comprises 2,300 species of which 29 are under national protection. It includes some threatened species such as lesser panda, mainland serow, Asiatic golden cat, Tibetan macaque and Chinese giant salamander.

Mount Emei is a place of historical importance being one of the four holy lands of Chinese Buddhism. Archaeological evidence indicates that area was inhabited as long as 10,000 years ago. Mount Emei's history has been documented and recorded for over 2,000 years during which time a rich Buddhist cultural heritage has accumulated.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION

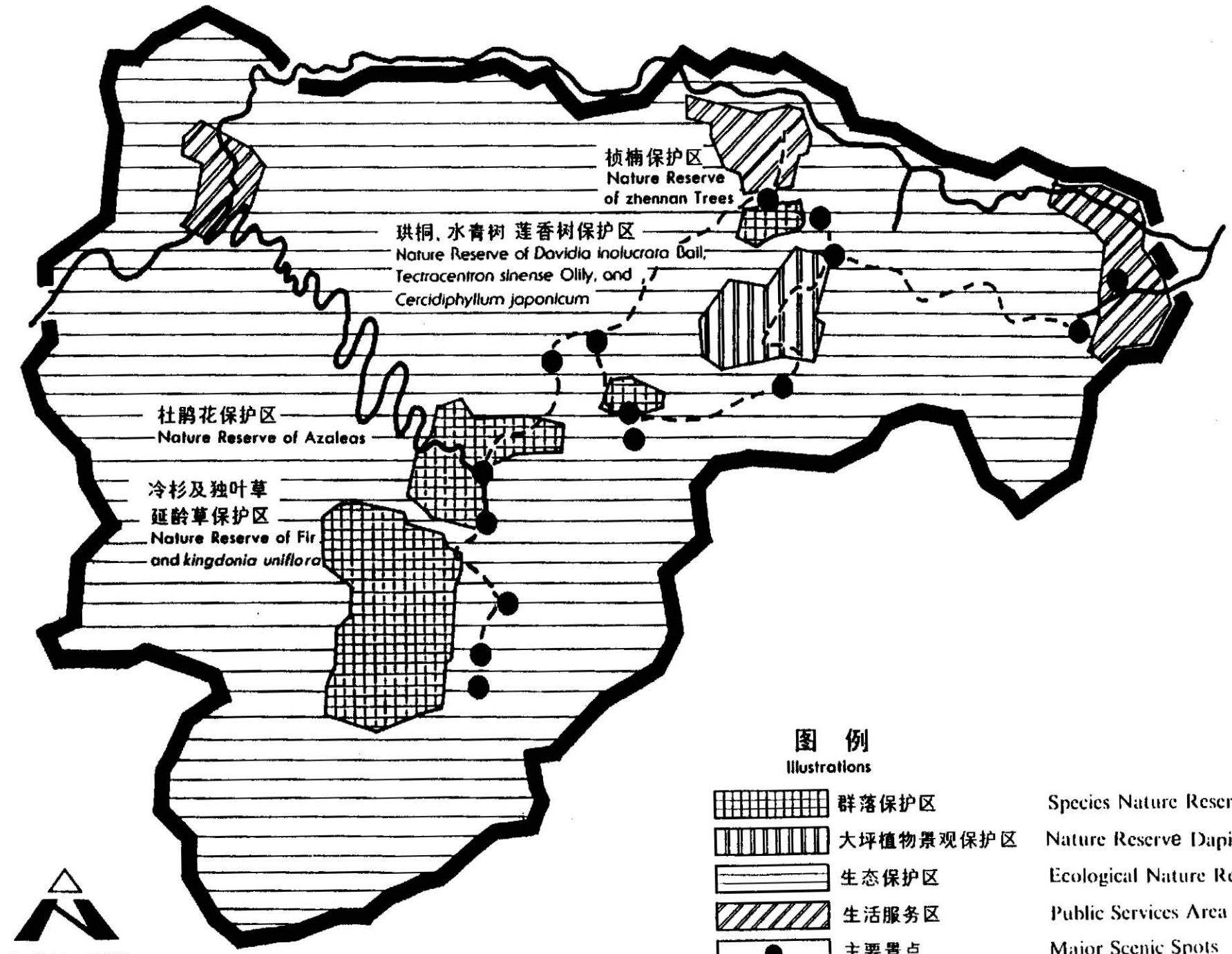
A General Plan, approved by the State Council, together with specialized conservation and management plans, provides the management framework. The Mount Emei Administration holds immediate responsibility for the site. Four protected management zones have been established, for rare and endangered plants and one for natural landscape.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The Government of the People's Republic of China has presented the following justification for designation of Mt. Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha as a World Heritage natural property:

- (iii) **Contains areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.** Mount Emei is a place of exceptional beauty. Its aesthetic importance is reflected in the work of artists and writers.
- (iv) **Contains important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity.** Mount Emei supports a diverse flora and fauna, including endemic and globally threatened species.

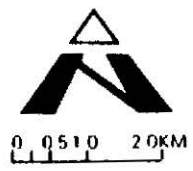
WHC/JWT/amb
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图例

Illustrations

- | | | |
|---|-----------|------------------------------------|
|  | 群落保护区 | Species Nature Reserve |
|  | 大坪植物景观保护区 | Nature Reserve Daping Plants Scene |
|  | 生态保护区 | Ecological Nature Reserve |
|  | 生活服务区 | Public Services Area |
|  | 主要景点 | Major Scenic Spots |



WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

MOUNT EMEI AND LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA (CHINA)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- (i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (8 references)
- (ii) Additional Literature Consulted: Palmer, M., 1996. *Travels Through Sacred China*. Thorsons; Bernbaum, E., 1995. *Sacred Mountains of the World*. Sierra Club; Mullikin, M.A. and Hotchkis, A.M., 1973. *The Nine Sacred Mountains of China*. Vetch and Lee; NEPA. 1994. *China Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan*. 106p. Landcaster R. 1989. *Travels in China - A Plantsman Paradise*.
- (iii) Consultations: 6 external reviewers, Chinese, Provincial and Municipal Government representatives, University staff.
- (iv) Field Visit: May, 1996. Jim Thorsell, N. de Silva.

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Mount Emei lies on the border of the Oriental Deciduous Forest and Chinese Subtropical Forest Biogeographical Provinces. This location at the interface of two floristic regions means that elements of both Provinces are present. This results in a relatively high species diversity. There are no existing natural World Heritage sites in the subtropical zone of China although there are other important conservation areas in the Province (e.g. Wuyi Mountains, Damingshan and Dayaoshan). Added to its "crossroads" location, Emei also displays a wide vertical zonation with five types of subtropical forests due to its variation in altitude from 500 to 3100 m. Along with its concentration of endemic species (320) and its interesting relict flora, Emei stands out as one of the most diverse areas of its type in China.

In terms of wildlife, Emei has a species complement typical of the biogeographic region. There are some rare mammals and birds but it does not stand out for its fauna as it does for its flora. Similarly its scenery, though spectacular, is typical of many of the scenic mountains in China and does not match that of the two other Sichuan Mountain sites or Huangshan and Wulingyuan.

In sum, Emei is of particular distinction for its high floral diversity with many endemic and many ancient and endangered plants. It is the main mountain site of international botanical importance in the Chinese sub-tropical forest biogeographic region.

3. INTEGRITY

Emei is one of four sacred Buddhist mountains in China and, as such, it has been treated as a special protected place for almost 3000 years. Protection in modern times has taken the form of laws

culminating in its establishment as a "Scenic Area" in 1982. The area is subject to various regulations from the national, provincial and municipal governments and has a plan to guide its conservation.

The main threat to Emei is the number of tourists and pilgrims that visit the site and the development that they bring with them. The main intrusion has been a cable car which leads to the Golden Summit of the mountain and brings some 300,000 people a year to the sensitive montane forest zone. There are numerous drink stands and souvenir stalls which detract from the natural atmosphere of the mountain. Its sacred traditions are diminishing in the age of the package tour and mass tourism. As noted by Zhang Huane of the Chinese Taoist Association: "Holy mountains are meant to be hard to climb, arduous to explore, for in that struggle lies humility. To build cable cars is not just to disturb the natural balance, it is to deprive us of a sense of awe".

Respecting this sentiment, further intrusion into the scenic area needs to be carefully controlled. Already many of the trails are overcrowded and developments are proceeding around the margins of the site. Construction of a mini-rail on the summit was fortunately stopped after it became apparent that its impact was unacceptable. Restoration is now in progress. Policies to keep further growth within Emei City should be encouraged.

Fortunately because of its size and the relative inaccessibility of its terrain, much of Emei remains untouched and unspoiled. The revival of Buddhism reinforces its protection as the monks can play a quasi-warden role. Indeed, it is crucial that the monasteries are fully integrated into the conservation management of the mountain as the involvement of the religious authorities can greatly reinforce site management. For example, the Taoist monks on Qingchenshan take responsibility for keeping the mountain clear of rubbish and restrict tourists to certain areas.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A separate component of the nomination is the Great Buddha at Leshan. This is predominantly a cultural site though some natural values are found (a remnant patch of natural forest and some birdlife). Natural world heritage values exist only on Mount Emei.

5. EVALUATION

Mount Emei is a site of special significance to conservation and to science for its high floral diversity. This is due to its transitional location at the edge of the Sichuan basin and the east Himalayan highlands. Within its elevation range of 2600m are found a great variety of subtropical vegetation zones including evergreen broad-leaved forest, mixed evergreen and deciduous broad-leaved forest, mixed broad-leaved and conifer forests, and subalpine conifer forest. There are a great number of endemic plants (100), medicinal plants (1600), ancient forms of plants and individual tree specimens over 1000 years old. Emei is one of the best known mountains in China in botanical and horticultural circles. Emei thus meets criterion *iv* as an area with high biodiversity and as a significant habitat for threatened species. The rationale for the use of criterion *iii* is not convincing and this is seen as an important but secondary value.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Mount Emei meets criteria *iv* for natural properties and should be added to the World Heritage List. The Committee may wish to register their concern to the Chinese authorities over the extent of tourism development at the site and the need to carefully control further intrusions.

WHC/JWT/amb
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