IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2014 **(archived)**
Finalised on 14 August 2014

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Mount Taishan. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Mount Taishan

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
China
Inscribed in: 1987
Criteria:
(i) (ii) (iii) (iv) (v) (vi) (vii)

Site description:

The sacred Mount Tai ('shan' means 'mountain') was the object of an imperial cult for nearly 2,000 years, and the artistic masterpieces found there are in perfect harmony with the natural landscape. It has always been a source of inspiration for Chinese artists and scholars and symbolizes ancient Chinese civilizations and beliefs.
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SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Good with some concerns

Given the importance of Taishan for the Chinese people, both locally and nationally, there should be long-term, sustainable support for conserving the values of the site. A well-funded and well-staffed management system is in place to deal with the most serious threats to Taishan – the negative impacts of heavy and growing visitation and the danger of wildfires and pest infestation. The existing management system needs to allow for fuller participation of local communities in decision-making and getting equitable benefits. The impacts of cable cars on the scenery and visitor experience are of concern, as is the threat of extinction of red-scale fish. Interpretation, staff training, water management, and fire control measures could use improvement.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Low Concern
Trend: Improving

Overall the high regard in which Taishan is held by local communities and the Chinese people insures that its aesthetic values as China’s most important sacred mountain have been largely maintained and enhanced, with the exception of unsightly cable cars that have left scars on the landscape. Since inscription numerous shacks, houses, and unsightly structures have been removed, improving the state of the site.

Overall THREATS

Low Threat

The major threats come from heavy, increasing visitation and from dry conditions that could spark forest fires that would threaten the natural and cultural heritage of Taishan. Changes in forest size and composition threaten natural and scenic values on Taishan. Additional threats come from the adverse impacts of cable

cars and pests and disease infestation of trees.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

The importance of Taishan as a major sacred site has ensured that the mountain has been fairly well protected for its natural, cultural, and spiritual values. A well-staffed and well-funded administration with clear legal authority means that the site has received protection that has addressed some major threats. However, overcrowding during peak seasons still remains a problem and fire control has been deemed inadequate. The management also needs to involve local communities more in its decision-making.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► Dramatic mountain scenery

Criterion:(vii)

With nearly 3 billion years of natural evolution, Mount Taishan was formed through complicated geological and biological processes, which resulted in a gigantic rock mass covered with dense vegetation towering over the surrounding plateau. This dramatic and majestic mountain is an outstanding combination of a beautiful natural landscape dominated by the cultural impacts of thousands of years of human use and valued in turn for its profound influence on Chinese culture. Mount Taishan is the most famous sacred mountain of China, with exceptional historic, cultural, aesthetic and scientific value (SoOUV, 2012).

Other important biodiversity values

► Rich flora and fauna

954 species of higher plants from 157 families occur in the property. The site’s fauna includes 37 species of mammals, 200 bird, 12 reptile and 6 amphibian specie (Sun, 1999).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Low Threat

The adverse impacts of large, increasing numbers of visitors threaten scenic values and visitor experience but measures have been taken to address this threat, including the removal of unsightly structures and limitations on inappropriate commercial activity on the mountain. Changes in forest size and composition threaten natural and scenic values on Taishan, as does the threat of dry conditions and forest fires. Cable cars concentrate visitors in vulnerable places and degrade the experience of some visitors, especially those who come as pilgrims. There is a threat of extinction of the endemic red-scale fish. There is a threat of loss of traditional culture and the effects of loss of traditional livelihoods.

▶ Temperature changes

Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Continual dry weather and man-made actions increase the danger of forest fires (Periodic Report, 2003). In the dry season the pine forest is very vulnerable to fire. Preservation and management facilities such as fire control have been inadequate in the past (WCMC, 2011).

▶ Housing/ Urban Areas

Very Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Houses on the mountain interfering with scenic values have been removed (WCMC, 2011). As a follow-up to recommendations made by the WH

Committee in 1998, the Administration removed 9,000 square meters of shabby houses (Periodic Report, 2003).

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

There used to be many unsightly billboards and barbecue shacks. These have now been removed although commercial structures remain (WCMC, 2011). As a follow-up to recommendations made by the WH Committee in 1998, the administration has pulled down inns scattered under the Jade Emperor Peak and removed the ‘Pavilion Watching Sunrise’ on Watching Sunrise Peak (Periodic Report, 2003).

► Mining/ Quarrying

Low Threat
Inside site

Damage from quarrying for rocks by farmers was on the increase in 1987 (IUCN, 1987). Although prohibited, even after designation as a World Heritage site, rocky quarrying by local farmers has continued, impairing scenic values (WCMC 2011).

► Logging/ Wood Harvesting

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

A study carried out on changes between 1986 and 2001 showed a significant decrease in Pinus forests, due mainly to the conversion to Quercus and mixed forests. Forest vegetation patches have become more fragmented, isolated, and much smaller since 1986. In addition increases in bare slopes threaten the area (Guo, 2006).

► Fire/ Fire Suppression

High Threat

Inside site
Outside site

Continual dry weather and man-made actions increase the danger of forest fires (Periodic Report, 2003). In the dry season the pine forest is very vulnerable to fire. Preservation and management facilities such as fire control have been inadequate in the past (WCMC, 2011).

► Other Ecosystem Modifications

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Forest diseases and insect pests threaten the ecological environment and scenic values of Taishan (Periodic Report, 2003).

► Household Sewage/ Urban Waste Water

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Tourist pressures are very heavy, inundating the area during holidays and festivals (WCMC, 2011).

► Changes in traditional ways of life and knowledge systems

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Relocation of villages within Taishan have led to loss of arable land and traditional livelihoods, only partially offset by income from tourism. The non-traditional housing provided to the villagers outside the site has led to a weakening of traditional culture (Xiang, 2009).

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas, Roads/ Railroads

Low Threat
Inside site

The construction of cable cars has left unseemly scars and for many visitors interferes with their experience of a mountain they regard as sacred (Beijing Review, 2001). In 2001 a second cable car was built up the mountain,

destroying forest and mountainside, leaving rubble, and leading to souvenir stone mining for sale to visitors (WCMC, 2011). The WHC has recommended removing cable cars, but this has not been done either in practice or in the latest management plan (Xiang, 2009).

Potential Threats

High Threat

Dislocation of villagers from Taishan and lack of their involvement in decision making, accompanied by perceptions of inequitable distribution of benefits from tourism, could threaten future local support for conservation and protection of the site.

► Identity/ Social Cohesion/ Changes in local population and community

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Dislocation of villagers from Taishan and lack of their involvement in decision making, accompanied by perceptions of inequitable distribution of benefits from tourism, could threaten future local support for conservation and protection of the site. (Xiang, 2009).

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Highly Effective

The property is managed under the regional level. The Shandong People’s Congress issued special Regulations to protect Taishan in 1991 (Periodic Report, 2003)

► Relationships with local people

Some Concern

Local people have been relocated with attendant loss of arable land and

disruptions to their traditional livelihoods and ways of life. Although they revere the mountain as their mother and are enthusiastic about tourism and have derived some benefits from it as a partial replacement for loss of livelihoods, they a less than equitable role in decision-making (Xiang, 2009).

► Legal framework and enforcement

Highly Effective

Legal protection is afforded to both natural and historic heritages of Taishan 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 (WCMC, 2011). Management is considered to be legal, contractual, and traditional (Periodic Report, 2003).

► Management system

Mostly Effective

The Tai'an Municipal Administrative Committee of the Taishan Scenic and Historic Interest Zone is responsible for both the protection and administration of the area. On the basis of multi-disciplinary scientific studies, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection, the University of Beijing and the Administrative Committee of the Mt. Taishan Scenic Beauty and Historic Interest Zone jointly revised a Management and Development Plan for the zone from 2002-2010 in accordance with the Interim Regulations issued by the State Council. The administrative structure has been modified, the local government function strengthened, scientific and technical personnel trained, facilities improved and expanded and residents encouraged to move out. The staff of the Park comprises 2020: 280 in management, 1,276 technical and 444 other support personnel (WCMC, 2011).

► Management effectiveness

Mostly Effective

According to the 1998 UNESCO mission to Taishan, the site was well managed, with considerable effort expended in careful path formation, extensive re-vegetation (83% of the site is now forested), removal of human wastes, encouraging visitors not to litter etc. The administration also was

doing a good job of managing around 2.5 million visitors per year, but needed to put more effort into educating visitors about the cultural and natural values of the site (Jing, 1998). However, according to a more recent monitoring report, preservation and management facilities such as fire control have been inadequate in the past. Owing to inadequate water resources and poor management, the endemic red-scaled fish is on the verge of extinction. Even after the mountain's designation as a World Heritage site, damage to scenic sites and rock quarrying by local farmers continued (WCMC, 2011).

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Mostly Effective

As follow-up action to recommendations made by the WH Committee in 1998, the Government of China has pulled down inns scattered under the Jade Emperor Peak, removed the 'Pavilion Watching Sunrise' on Watching Sunrise Peak; and (removed 9,000 m2 of shabby houses (Periodic Reporting, 2003). However, recommendations regarding removal of cable cars have not been adopted.

► Boundaries

Highly Effective

The boundaries of the property and buffer zone are adequate to ensure protection of WH values (Periodic Reporting, 2003).

► Sustainable finance

Highly Effective

Financial resources for the maintenance and protection of Taishan are allocated from the government and supplemented by entrance fees to scenic areas (SoOUV, 2012). Funding is considered adequate, and can maintain the regular protection of the site (Periodic Reporting, 2003). However, no figures were provided as of 2003.

► Staff training and development

Some Concern

In 2003 the staff of the Park comprised 2020: 280 in management, 1,276

technical and 444 other support (WCMC, 2011). The staffing level was deemed adequate but training was needed “to improve sustainable development” and the assistance of foreign experts was welcomed (Periodic Reporting, 2003).

► Sustainable use

Some Concern

Controls on tourism and commercial activity in place, along with local veneration of the sacred mountain and its importance for Chinese culture and history, could form a basis for sustainable use of the site. However, the current overemphasis on economic benefits over resource conservation could pose some problems (Xiang, 2009). Over visitation during high seasons endangers the sustainability of resource use in the long run. Cable cars bring huge amount of people in relatively short time which disrupts the spatio-temporal rationality and stresses the capacity of the site.

► Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

The Taishan administration was encouraged to put more effort into educating visitors about the cultural and natural values of the site. In 1998 there was an Exhibition Centre near the entrance to the Central Route, but it was only visited by 0.02% of visitors (5000/yr) (Jing, 1998).

► Tourism and interpretation

Some Concern

Taishan is heavily visited. Between 1996 and 2001 annual visitors totaled 2.1 million, including 18,000 foreigners. On one holiday in 2001, 60,000 people visited the top of the mountain. In 2010 there were 3.96 million visitors, an increase of 11.7% on 2009 (WCMC, 2011). A survey of visitors conducted in 2005 showed that a weak majority indicated that they were content with the tour guiding and interpretation available at Taishan (Xiang, 2009). A visitor management framework is required to ensure the safety of tourists and the sustainability of the resource use (Confidential consultation, 2014).

► Monitoring

Mostly Effective

As of 2003, there was a regular monitoring program for air and water quality, plant diseases and pests and the condition of famous trees (WCMC, 2011). Between 1987 and 2003, 8 monitoring exercises were carried out (cultural relics, famous trees, forest diseases, wild plants, animals, microorganisms, forest resources and heritage). In 2001, a WH Administrative Office was created in Taishan to co-ordinate regular monitoring and a 'Heritage Data Base'. The objective is to "turn discontinuous to continuous monitoring". Primary monitoring indicators include: (i) air and waste gas analysis; (ii) water quality; (iii) plant diseases & insect pests; and (iv) the state of famous trees. Support from the WHF may be required regarding forest diseases and pests ("turning medical control to biological control"), equipment & technology for systematic monitoring. (Periodic Reporting, 2003).

▶ Research

Highly Effective

The Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection of Beijing University and the Historical Interest Zone Administrative Committee have collectively studied the geology, landforms, animals and cultural relics, as well as forest fires, pine disease and forest regeneration to provide a scientific basis for managing the area (WCMC, 2011). An analysis of spatio-temporal landscape patterns between 1986 and 2001 was carried out, showing major changes in forest cover and composition (Guo, 2006). Research in 2005 used Taishan as a case study to examine the implications of World Heritage designation for resource conservation, visitor experience, and local well-being (Xiang, 2009).

Overall assessment of protection and management

Mostly Effective

The importance of Taishan as a major sacred site has ensured that the mountain has been fairly well protected for its natural, cultural, and spiritual values. A well-staffed and well-funded administration with clear legal authority means that the site has received protection that has addressed some major threats. However, overcrowding during peak seasons still remains a problem and fire control has been deemed inadequate. The management also needs to

involve local communities more in its decision-making.

▶ **Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site**

Data Deficient

Other than impacts of management on four villages outside the site, three of which consist mostly of communities dislocated from Taishan, there is little information on the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site. The management has provided some benefits to these villagers, which has helped maintain their support for nature conservation on Taishan, but they have not involved them in decision-making (Xiang, 2009)

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ **Dramatic mountain scenery**

Low Concern
Trend:Improving

The high regard in which Taishan is held by local communities and the Chinese people insures that values as China’s most important sacred mountain have been largely maintained and enhanced, with the exception of cable cars that have left scars on the landscape and interfere with some visitors’ experience. Since inscription numerous shacks, houses, and unsightly structures have been removed, improving the scenery and other measures have been taken to add protection to the site.

Other important biodiversity values

▶ **Rich flora and fauna**

954 species of higher plants from 157 families occur in the property. The site’s fauna includes 37 species of mammals, 200 bird, 12 reptile and 6

amphibian specie (Sun, 1999).

Summary of the Values

▶ **Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values**

Low Concern

Trend: Improving

Overall the high regard in which Taishan is held by local communities and the Chinese people insures that its aesthetic values as China's most important sacred mountain have been largely maintained and enhanced, with the exception of unsightly cable cars that have left scars on the landscape. Since inscription numerous shacks, houses, and unsightly structures have been removed, improving the state of the site.

▶ **Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values**

Data Deficient

Trend: Data Deficient

Data deficient

Additional information

Key conservation issues

▶ **Heavy visitation**

Local

Taishan is under very heavy pressure from increasing, large numbers of visitors, especially on holidays, with attendant impacts on visitor experience and demand for facilities that would degrade the scenic and cultural values of the site.

▶ **Changing composition of the landscape**

Local

Forested areas are being reduced in size and fragmented. Also, due to human intervention the composition of forests is changing from native pine to mixtures with other non-native tree species all of which have impacts on the scenic values and integrity of the site.

▶ **Forest fires and forest pest infestations**

Local

Dry conditions and lack of adequate fire fighting measures are imperiling forests, although there have been no major wildfires recently. Infestations of pests also threaten the trees and some measures are being taken. Famous trees with great historical and cultural value could be threatened.

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

▶ **History and tradition**

The natural and cultural heritage of Taishan enshrines cultural and spiritual values central to Chinese culture and history, having to do with the identity, beliefs, and ideals of the Chinese people.

▶ **Wilderness and iconic features**

Taishan itself is the most important sacred mountain in China and is regarded by local villagers as their mother. The mountain also has within it numerous smaller sacred sites and features, such as trees, rocks, and temples, which provide cultural and spiritual benefits to local people and visitors.

▶ **Outdoor recreation and tourism**

As China’s most important sacred mountain and repository of Chinese history and civilization, Taishan is one of the most important tourist sites in China and provides major economic, spiritual, cultural, and historical benefits to visitors and local people. The high visitation due to its place in Chinese civilization and history insures sustainable financing for management of the

site.

Summary of benefits

Conservation of nature at Taishan protects a major sacred mountain highly valued for its importance in Chinese history and civilization and its role as a repository of priceless cultural relics. The cultural and spiritual values enshrined in the mountain sustain local cultures and communities and remind the Chinese people of their cultural and natural heritage. The high visitation of tourism that Taishan attracts provides economic benefits for local people and ensures that management will have sustainable funding for taking proper care of the site.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Tai'an Municipal Administrative Committee of the Taishan Scenic and Historic Interest Zone		No information on currently active projects is available – only past projects. The Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection of Beijing University and the Historical Interest Zone Administrative Committee have collectively studied the geology, landforms, animals and cultural relics, also forest fires, pine disease and forest regeneration to provide a scientific basis for managing the area.. The Tai'an Municipal Administrative Committee of the Taishan Scenic and Historic Interest Zone, which is responsible for both the protection and administration of the area, should be consulted as to whether any of these or other projects are on-going.

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	N.A.	Improvement of relations with local communities and their inclusion in decision-making for the site.	

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
2	N.A.	Training for staff and further development of education and interpretation for the site	
3	N.A.	Monitoring of the impacts of high visitation	

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