IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2017 **(archived)**
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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

2017 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. Interpretation, staff training and water management could be further improved.

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 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. Forest fires and dry conditions threaten natural and scenic values of the property. Additional threats

come from the disease infestation of trees and adverse impacts of extreme weather. 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 loss of traditional culture and the effects of loss of traditional livelihoods.

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. 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**

1614 species of higher plants from 775 genus, 191 families occur in the property. The site’s fauna includes 25 species of mammals, 315 bird, 12 reptile and 6 amphibian species (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

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. Forest fires and dry conditions threaten natural and scenic values of the property. Additional threats come from the disease infestation of trees and adverse impacts of extreme weather. 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 loss of traditional culture and the effects of loss of traditional livelihoods.

▶ Logging/ Wood Harvesting

Low Threat
Inside site, scattered(5-15%)
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). In recent years, the forest composition has been optimized through forest management measures and forest cover has also increased (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

▶ Other Ecosystem Modifications

High Threat

Inside site, widespread(15-50%)
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, widespread(15-50%)
Outside site

Tourist pressures are very heavy, inundating the area during holidays and festivals (WCMC, 2011). Pollution resulting from high visitation rates continues to be a problem (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas, Roads/ Railroads

Low Threat
Inside site, localised(<5%)

The construction of cable cars has left unseemly scars and for many visitors cable cars interfere with their experience of a mountain they regard as sacred (Beijing Review, 2001). A cable car in Zhongtianmen was built in 1983 and ungraded in 2000. A cable car in Taohuayuan was built in 1993.

► Housing/ Urban Areas

Very Low Threat
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).

► Temperature extremes

Low Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)
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). A number of management measures have been undertaken to address the issue, including the restriction areas that can be visited by tourists and delineating the areas open for visitation. Forest fire prevention networks have been established. These measures helped reduce fire risks and resulted in a long period without major fires (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

Potential Threats

Low 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

Low Threat
Inside site, localised(<5%)
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

► 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

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).

► Enforcement

Mostly Effective

Enforcement of relevant regulations is effective overall (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► 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). The Conservation and Management Regulations on Taishan National Park and Regulations on National Parks of Shandong Province were further revised and improved in 2016 and 2017 (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► 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. (WCMC, 2011). In 2016, the Master Plan of Taishan National Park was revised by the

Management Committee of Taishan. The administrative structure has been modified and the local government function strengthened (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► Management effectiveness

Mostly Effective

According to the 1998 UNESCO mission to Taishan, at the time of inscription 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). Concerns have later been expressed with regard to inadequate management of water resources leading to the decline of the endemic red-scaled fish (WCMC, 2011). In 2005, after the adjustment in the management system of Taishan, more stringent water resources protection and management system has been established (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► 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

Mostly Effective

In 2017 the staff of the Park comprises 1819 employees: 632 in management, 554 technical and 633 other support personnel (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► Sustainable use

Some Concern

Controls on tourism and commercial activity in place (such as Regulations and Implementing Rules on Operating Points in Taishan), 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. Over visitation continues to be of concern (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► 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). The Geopark Museum of Taishan and the Tianwai Village Tourist Center and Taohua Vally Tourist Center built in 2010 provide important educational facilities (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

► Tourism and visitation management

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. (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). More recently, research has focused on early warning of major forest pests (Shen 2012), biodiversity (Wang 2013), landscape forest management (Guo 2014) and Quaternary glaciers in

Taishan (Zhang 2012).

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. 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.

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**

Low Concern

Trend: Improving

No comprehensive information is available on the current state of the site's flora and fauna. However, some species have been in decline, including for example the endemic plant species of Sorbus taishanensis and Rhus taichanensis. However, measures have been put in place to address the issue (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► Cultural and spiritual values, 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.

► Cultural and spiritual values, Sacred natural sites or landscapes

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.

► Health and recreation, 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		The Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection, Peking University, TsingHua University and Administrative Committee of Taishan National Park have collectively studied the geology, landforms, cultural relics, forest regeneration and disease control, natural disaster, water harnessing and other protection and management goals and environmental elements of the property, to provide a scientific and important basis for rational utilization and effective management of the site. 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.	Monitoring of the impacts of high visitation	
2	N.A.	Training for staff and further development of education and interpretation for the site	
3	N.A.	Improvement of relations with local communities and their inclusion in decision-making for the site.	

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