

## SETTING FACTORS AND JUDGING STANDARDS OF WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### **Introduction**

Since our international colleagues proposed the theme of this General Assembly, the inexpressible word “setting” has puzzled me. I am always trying to find an appropriate Chinese definition for it. Although I have thoroughly discussed its translation with a lot of linguists and experts on cultural heritage conservation many times, not one single answer has ever satisfied me. At last, I can only use “*HuanJing*” (環境) in Chinese for its translation, but with the annotation .

During my recent discussions with Mr. Jukka Jokilehto and Professor Herb Stovel about this issue, they also agreed to the method of using explanatory note. Jukka thought that the significance of “setting” should be elaborated in light of the meaning of “context”. I quite agree with him. Thus, I add the following explanatory note:

That in this case “*HuanJing*” describes the entire specific landscape and atmosphere created by the following elements: the innate temperament of the heritage and especially the ideas of existence, interrelationship and influence of the surrounding relevant natural and cultural materials. All related tangible and intangible cultural elements should be included. These factors altogether give a complete and correct explanation of “setting”. I was told that there also isn’t a word for “setting” in French. This may reflect, from another point of view, the complexity and importance of the theme of this General Assembly.

In accordance with regulation N° 87 of the new edition of the “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention” (hereafter referred to as the Guidelines) which took effect in February 2005, “all properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List shall satisfy the conditions of integrity.” In addition, according to regulation N° 82 of the Guidelines, “authenticity” has to include “setting” as one of its determining factors – “Depending on the type of cultural

heritage, and its cultural context, properties may be understood to meet the conditions of authenticity if their cultural value (as recognized in the nomination criteria proposed) are truthfully and credibly expressed through a variety of attributes including:

- form and design;
- materials and substance;
- use and function;
- traditions, techniques and management systems;
- location and setting;
- language, and other forms of intangible heritage;
- spirit and feeling;
- and other internal and external factors.”

In other words, “setting” is concerned with authenticity and integrity in the process of identification of World Heritage. In fact, it is also concerned with nomination, monitoring and management of World Heritage. Hence, how to understand and judge the “setting” factors and how to define different quality standards for the judgment become the most important concerns of the work of World Heritage.

As we know, “setting” is forming an essential part of the value of World Heritage – It directly affects people’s feeling on the beauty and value of heritage. It also influences people’s cognition and knowledge of history, science, culture and tradition. Moreover, different analysis, research and treatment towards “setting” factors must be conducted according to the different objects in question. For example, there may be difference between the primary environment and deutero-genic environment, between which there are also interaction and integration. The original environmental factors contained in towns, villages, societies which are created by human groups living in a natural region since ancient times all belong to primary environment, including climate, mountains and rivers, animals and plants, typography and geology, and the mode of production, life style, social relations, customs, ethics developed during the course of interaction between the original inhabitants and the nature .Comparatively speaking, the deutero-genic environmental factors are more complicated. In places with

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a foundation of human civilization or ceaseless significant natural changes, the cultural heritage resulted from the inflow of the culture of exotic groups will be inevitably influenced and restricted by the original environment, and at the same time exert influence on the original environmental relations, absorb and integrate deuterogenic environmental factors. The spread of Buddhism and the communication between oriental and western civilizations, such as the environmental relations of the Silk Road, can all serve as such proofs.

Therefore, there are varieties of determining factors for judging the quality standards of setting, including: nature, suitable valuing standard and the level of heritage conservation, historical background, natural conditions, other tangible and intangible objective conditions, social, cultural and national traditions, and interrelationship and influence of different forming factors, the relationship between the surrounding historical and cultural environment and the background of the development of human civilization.,etc.

### **Pondering the Requests for Requirement of the Quality of Setting and Relevant Conservation and Management from a Viewpoint of the Identification and Valuing Standard of World Cultural Heritage**

When defining World Cultural Heritage, the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” (hereafter referred to as the Convention) mentions “their place in the landscape” and “works of man or the combined works of nature and of man”. In fact, both of these ideas represent “setting” factors of heritage, as well as its relevant internal and external relationships.

When the Guidelines mention the standard of evaluation for integrity, the following factors must be stated clearly: a) includes all elements necessary to express its outstanding universal value; b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property’s significance; and c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

In addition, according to regulation N° 89 of the Guidelines, “for properties nominated under criteria (i) to (vi), the physical fabric of the property and/or its significant features should be in good condition, and the impact of deterioration processes controlled. A significant

proportion of the elements necessary to convey the totality of the value conveyed by the property should be included. Relationships and dynamic functions present in cultural landscapes, historic towns or other living properties essential to their distinctive character should also be maintained.” Thus, in terms of standard of evaluation and identification of heritage, and also in terms of comprehensive, effective and sustainable conservation of heritage, factors and relationships of “setting” are no longer acting as a foil from which heritage stands out in contrast, but they become the organic contents of tangible and intangible heritage.

Mr. *Liang Sicheng*, an authoritative figure on cultural heritage conservation in China, described the relationship between the environment and a single or a group of historic monuments by saying, “even the most beautiful flower needs green leaves to highlight its beauty”. And nowadays, discussion of “setting” goes deeper. The “Venice Charter” mentions “setting” several times. It indicates that “the concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event.” Hence, the Charter believes that “the conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale.” Besides, “a monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs.”

There is also a similar viewpoint in the “Nara Document on Authenticity 1994” that “depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgments may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits the elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.”

In short, “setting” is concerned with the united representation of value of heritage. Setting, together with heritage itself, contains multiple and irreplaceable historical information, artistic characteristics, scientific contents and traditional atmosphere. It reflects the perfect integration or harmonious association and transition between nature and the creations of human beings. It also shows people’s rational and ingenious use of their soil. Besides, in this

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changing era, it passes down through the generations our religion, morality, artistic ideals, traditions, customs and national characteristics. Moreover, it represents various aesthetic ideals and humanity's continual achievements and advancements in architecture, agriculture, scientific technology and social organization. Therefore, when judging the valuing standard of Cultural Heritage, we have more and more concern over the important issues of "setting".

### **Integrity of Cultural Heritage and Integrity of Natural Heritage**

Originally, standard of integrity indicates that Natural Heritage, which has been listed in the World Heritage List, must embody a complete form of relevant natural characteristics, a combining or evolving process, or beautiful landscapes with relevant factors. It must embody multiple diversified ecosystems. Besides, it must also have sufficient scope and contain adequate and essential elements. Therefore, some colleagues always believed that principles for integrity could not be applied to Cultural Heritage. For instance, how can you imagine that a mere archaeological site reflects the totality of a long and complete history?

Now that principles for integrity have become accepted by most of our colleagues and have been added to the Guidelines, we have to face and use them in our daily practices.

When judging the quality standard of Cultural Heritage, we should first consider whether the existing site or phenomenon of Cultural Heritage can prove and reflect the complete achievement and multiplicity of information of a particular period in history, traditions, techniques or aesthetics, but should not focus only on whether the structure or remaining situation of the carriers of this information is complete.

Besides, when judging the integrity of Cultural Heritage, we should focus more on observation and judging the integrity and harmony of the relevant setting. From this point of view, discussion on the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of ICOMOS will directly affect the cognition and practice of integrity of Cultural Heritage.

Integrity contains material existence and association of heritage itself, and also contains the relationship and influence of the surrounding setting, including the heritage's interaction with a particular area, overall outline, passage of sight, weight and size, colour, nature, functions and

impression; and the air above, the ground and the water; tangible and intangible elements, etc.

### **In the Process of Identifying Heritage, Requirement of Setting should be different according to Historical Background, Transition of Natural Environment, Contemporary Objective Conditions and Social Conditions. There would be Technical Difference made by the Different Valuing Standard of Heritage itself**

Being the same as the cognition and discussion of "authenticity", the cognition of "setting" and research on a standard of concrete operation in real practice would be an endless process. But, in a particular period of time, under particular conditions, there should be a comparatively clear mode.

Ideal quality of setting is always our insistent principle and goal. But it must be combined with real practice. And it has to be coordinated with, or kept in balance with the fight of contemporary social cognition, the need for multiple social developments, the possibility of subjectively and objectively accepting a relevant standard, and other series of relevant objective factors. However, we should advocate those unchangeable or non-destructible basic factors. In order to keep this balance, we need knowledge, courage, resolution, strategies and adaptability.

When considering giving suitable judgment of quality of setting to heritage, people in charge, including administrators, reporters of investigation and evaluation, and representatives of relevant international organization committees, to some extent, may elaborate the issues relying on their personal knowledge. As a result, there would be limitations according to different people in charge.

Generally speaking, heritage which applies to Criterion II, IV, V and maybe VI of the Convention needs to have a tangible material setting with sufficient scale, scope or content. Sometimes, it also needs a particular relevant intangible cultural environment and traditional atmosphere. And heritage with a cultural landscape has even more need of a relevant setting. Any inappropriate lack and loss, change, or contraction of setting factors would directly affect the heritage's value itself.

In real practice, the requirement for the background of setting of heritage, which applies to Criterion I, III or maybe

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VI of the Convention would be given different emphasis and would be concerned with different points of view. If we admit that every issue has exceptional case and that every principle has different specific form and method, we will have lots of special cases to discuss. Although this does not mean that setting factors can be eliminated, leniency may be allowed here, in terms of scale, scope, landscape, when comparing them with the requirements of other categories of heritage. Perhaps the historical, artistic, scientific values and volume of information of the essence can be enhanced through the level of concern over the entire evaluation.

### **Ignoring Setting Factors as Important Ingredients in the Value and Characteristic of Heritage has Left too much Regret in Human Society.**

#### **1 Damage to Entire Value and Heritage itself**

The most exceptional example is Beijing. It is sure that nowadays, the municipal government of Beijing has tried its best to protect the heritage in Beijing. It is worth being especially appreciated that based on great public participation, the large protected area of the Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and the buffer zone around it have been delimited. This work required great courage and devotion.

Now Beijing has another honourable new goal – the proposal of inscribing the Royal City, which is larger than the Forbidden City, into the World Heritage List. However, I cannot deny that because of historical reasons, new high-rise buildings and many other poor, nondescript, modernized buildings have seriously destroyed the setting both inside and outside the Royal City. Hence, it is difficult for us to carry out such a wonderful aspiration – the proposal for inscription of the Royal City. There is the same case in Xi'an. Our hosts, who have a very high level of sense of conservation, include the administrator of Xi'an and all enthusiastic and hospitable people. They are living in the ancient city of Xi'an where the historical regret has now left its mark.

Nowadays, our big cities have recalled the past with pangs in their heart. They understand how important the conservation of heritage and its setting are. For instance, when handling the problem of the discovery of the large scope of the sites from the Qin and Han Dynasties during urban development, despite the fact that difficult legal proceedings and extraneous expenses of over 10 million

USD would be needed for conservation, the mayor of the famous city, Guangzhou, said firmly, "What Guangzhou will lack in future is not high-rise buildings but these irreplaceable historic sites." Those sites and relationship of the relevant historical background and contemporary setting finally gain an appropriate treatment

#### **2 Disregard for Cultural Atmosphere and Intangible Heritage**

On one hand, people are arguing about principles of integrity of intangible heritage. On the other hand, the entire atmosphere of heritage and factors of intangible cultural heritage in terms of setting are changing.

The entire atmosphere and characteristics constructed by these cities' own historical backgrounds, natural conditions, national traditions and regional characteristics are now being replaced by assimilation, simplification and blind imitation. The incumbent President of State Administration of Cultural Heritage, Mr. *Shan Jixiang* showed us photos of different cities and asked, "Can you recognize which cities these are?"

The interdependent relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage affects the authenticity and integrity of heritage in the same way. However, we can see that comprehensive heritage which is originally full of vitality tends to be reconstructed as museums in buildings. Traditional inhabitants and their lifestyle, customs, festival activities, and national arts have been changed, have moved away, or have even withered. This phenomenon happens in both the alleys of Beijing and in poor remote villages. It is worth worrying about the latter. Because of the luck of history, those as yet inconvenient and underdeveloped areas conserve precious historic monuments and certain real harmonious setting. How to help those areas to follow the path of sustainable development and harmony, and how to protect them from the repeated occurrence of so many incessant and regretful cases will be a very important and meaningful mission for us.

The "Old Town of Lijiang" is still a comparatively successful case of heritage and setting conservation. However, you can find out, right in the town itself, that the jewellers who are wearing the local Naxi costume and accessories speak the dialect of He'nan – my homeland, which is situated in central China with mainly a Han population – and yet they occupied the centre of the old town. This trend of delocalization has become a headache in the conservation of the "Old Town of Lijiang".

### 3 Landscape and Beauty

Aesthetics is a comprehensive subject. The aesthetics of townscape and cultural landscape always affects people's feelings, emotions and cognition. The change of landscape and disappearance of regional characteristics will thus affect everyone's wonderful sense of belonging to the native soil, their sense of pride, their self-confidence and aggressiveness.

Regarding this aspect, there are a lot of positive cases. For instance, after the "Summer Palace, an Imperial Garden in Beijing" had been inscribed into the World Heritage List, the proposed construction of high-voltage overhead conductors within the beautiful setting of the summer palace and its mountain view and pagoda was forced to be built underground. The Government had to pay 20 million USD more for this construction work. It seems that, there in the Summer Palace, lots of tourism development plans had been set up. One of them was a plan to connect the watercourse with the important element of the Summer Palace: Kunming Lake. In order to do so, the gate between the watercourse and Kunming Lake would have had to open and the surface of the Lake would have shrunk by 30 cm. This definitely would have damaged the relationship between the Summer Palace and its setting. Therefore, the plan was repealed. During the process of their inscription into World Heritage, the local government and public of the "Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa", the "Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System", the "Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom" and the "Longmen Grottoes" had to devote a lot of effort and money in the millions of USD, in order to protect and retain the harmonious environment

Someone has predicted before, that Hangzhou, which is praised as "the Heaven on earth", will lose its attraction, superiority and characteristics, if Xihu, the best-known and the most beautiful lake in Hangzhou, continues to gradually become a pond surrounded by high-rise buildings, thus forfeiting the traditional image of Xihu, which is one of harmony with the mountains and the sky, one that contains the cultural elements of poetry, penmanship, history and tea. This point of view is gradually being accepted by more and more people.

However, besides the phenomenon of "thousand cities, same image" mentioned above, there are still a lot of dissatisfying phenomena. For instance, the core of Fuzhou, one of the Chinese National Historic and Cultural Cities, has been reconstructed into a city with no characteristics and

value. The line of sight to the city's monuments was blocked. Although the high-rise buildings at the edge of the ancient city of Lhasa were built outside the buffer zone of the World Heritage – "Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace", it is regretful that those buildings disrupted the line of sight from the "Jokhang Temple Monastery" towards the "Sera Monastery" and the skyline of the entire city. In many other cities, modernized buildings decorated by white tiles, chaotic signboards, advertisements and posters, inappropriate tourism facilities, the explosion of high-rise buildings, the removal of traditional dwellings and the rapid change in traditional lifestyles, the damage to views of the background, the borrowing of space and the opposition of scenery, etc. are all damaging the entire outline, the far and near visual sensation of our dwellings. They are also damaging the setting of the heritage. And in fact, they are damaging the quality of the original enjoyment of our lives – the harmonious nature and wonderful historic and cultural aspect of our environment.

### 4 Reality of History and Traditional Atmosphere

To some extent, we have to appreciate Lijiang and Lhasa for their successful cases; despite there remaining still some dissatisfying points.

The strangest case would be the former residence of Mr. *Zhou Enlai*. Mr Zhou is a giant who is well known all over the world. He was born in and, during his early age, lived in a declining wealthy family of ancient China. This former residence, which embodies his historical orbit, is a traditional residence of the type that stood in the common narrow streets of the ancient towns in Jiangnan. This is the reality that helps us to know and understand the path of Mr. Zhou's early life. However, contemporary interests reconstructed the traditional streetscape into a large square, in order to adore him and develop tourism. From the present setting of this heritage, who could understand the past family life of Mr. Zhou and the historical situation at that time? What is most regretful is that such cases are still happening.

### 5 Safety, Pollution and Other Concerns

Environment can even threaten the safety of an entire heritage. During this assembly, my colleague, Mr. Meng Fan Xing, will give a speech on "drawing a safety line at the underground of the "Yungang Grottoes". The speech is mainly about preventing the foundations of the Grottoes from the threat of the local popular work of coal mining, and so certain areas and boundaries are set to inhibit mining or any other excavation underground. We have come across

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great damage to heritage and its environment, such as industrial pollution from waste gas, dust pollution caused by construction work and traffic, the destructive effect of the overdevelopment of tourism, etc. Case studies should be conducted according to the different situations mentioned before.

Besides, cultural shock brought by overseas cultures into the traditional culture is our present discussion. When we welcome and thank the McDonald's and KFC's for bringing us the enjoyment of fast food, we must also think about the cultural diversity, continuity of traditions and characteristics, and constant exchange and integration of human civilizations.

There are still many other discussions involving landscape and traditions. I believe that our colleagues who have varying opinions will express their ideas.

### **The Global Strategy of Improving the Imbalance and Under-represented Categories of World Heritage Does Not Mean that We Can Diminish the Concern of Setting Factors**

ICOMOS indicates in the relevant reports that the balance in representation and geographical coverage of World Heritage, which we are seeking for, should not be seen as simply achieving the same amount of heritage among countries or categories. Being different in history and actual conditions, the situation of World Heritage, of course, cannot be same in all places. Balance and uniqueness indicate whether such a category of heritage is adequately represented in the World Heritage List. The standard of such a requirement should be unified and fair. And thus World Heritage's attribute of "belonging to all peoples of the world" is acknowledged. Hence, relevant requirement of setting is included.

There was once a heritage site (I fully understand that the country has an enthusiastic and hard-working devotion to application for World Heritage) the appearance of which has had a radical change, and yet it passed the examination because of an irrelevant ideal of "balance" while overlooking the importance of the quality of setting. I have discussed the relevant issues of standard with an important person of UNESCO who is enthusiastic about that case. But that colleague told me that the reason for inscribing that heritage is that "...they cannot find another proposal for inscription which has any better conditions!" This concept amazed me. I think, as an expert of ICOMOS, that our

judging standard should not adopt this non-professional viewpoint.

### **Multi-Disciplined Collaboration and Practice; Analysis, Summary and Promotion of Cognition, Definition and a Concrete Operation of Multiple Foundations of Setting and a Relevant Controlling Standard need to be Implemented. Discussion, Confirmation and Renovation also need to be Conducted in a Global Field according to Theoretical Principles and Quantitative Standard.**

The process of having imagination and ideal, principle and standard with rational conception is cause for great argument and ideological struggle. It is even more difficult to change the ideal and principle into a concrete controlling practice. Let's take "the appreciation of beauty" as an example. There is a common and traditional saying in Chinese that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder". World Heritage Committees are discussing how to apply Criterion III of World Natural Heritage. When applying Criterion VII, "exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance", of World Heritage in the Guidelines, long-lasting argument and confusion have occurred. Issues of how to judge and control heritage and its setting, which has a variety of natural conditions, historical and traditional backgrounds, and a social formation under different timeframes, need to be opened to the globe for continual multi-disciplined collaboration, comparative analysis, case confirmation, experiential and methodological propaganda and promotion. Besides, there should be an establishment and continual improvement of a detailed scientific standard aiming at different specific topics. According to this aspect, we are looking forward to our International Scientific Committees' more precise and specific devotion to the wonderful work of the entirety of humankind.

20 or 30 years before, we came across some small but quite interesting cases. For instance, people had argued about how to define whether the landscape background of a heritage site had been invaded. Someone suggested that the integrity of a landscape and the level of its controlled area, such as boundaries of buffer zones and protected areas, control of building's height, size, colour, overall outline and skyline would be considered appropriate if, when using a normal camera with a normal lens to take photos of the entire view of such heritage, no modern and disharmonious buildings or facilities could be perceived in the photos. As

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we all know, this method seems simple. However, it is very difficult in real practice. For another example, the influence on heritage and setting produced by industrial waste gas, wastewater, and dust pollution is another thorny problem, which involved science, management and a complex interest relationship. To give a more specific example: there was a conflict between the Longmen Grottoes and the new reconstruction case of a railway. How much vibration could the grottoes withstand? How much distance from the site should there be, in order for the traditional scene not to be destroyed? We could not find a concrete standard, but our colleagues insisted on one point – a hundred-year-old man could not bear any disease, even the flu. It is the same for the thousand-year-old Buddhist statues. Hence, the permissible level of vibration should be zero.

When it comes to the intangible factors of environmental problems, the specific operation will be more difficult. Regarding the problem of how to ask the contemporary interests and the youngsters to conserve and continue the historic cultural context and traditions with their special meanings, when they are chasing such a modernized life, it is hard to define a comparatively concrete standard for judgment and analysis.

Nevertheless, under the guidelines of wonderful ideals and correct principles, we have a comparatively unified harmony of conception and concrete judging standard. When getting to fully comprehend and define the “setting” factors of World Cultural Heritage and when making an appropriate, scientific and fair conclusion, we cannot deny that we will be affected by quality and the personal arbitrary judgment of ourselves. But our colleagues’ continual and in-depth mutual cognition will finally ensure and positively lead us to the correct direction of judgment. And this is exactly one of the reasons why ICOMOS and its scientific committees exist and are always full of vitality.

### **Abstract**

Setting is an indispensable component of the value embodiment of cultural Heritage. It is much related to the authenticity and integrity of heritage and has direct influence on people’s perception of the value of heritage and an accurate understanding of the associated history and culture. To neglect or damage the setting is to harm the heritage itself.

In evaluating sites for cultural heritage nominations and their state of conservation, setting must be taken into consideration as an essential element. Meanwhile, it should be noted that evaluation of settings of different properties may have different results due the differences in their characters and relevant criteria, history, nature, social environment and other objective facts. Therefore, exploring appropriate and universally acknowledged judgment tool will be conducive to the authority, balance and representativeness of the World Heritage List and be of practical help to our colleagues in ICOMOS.