

CONSERVING THE COMPREHENSIVE IMAGE OF NATURAL SETTINGS FOR WORLD HERITAGE SITES: A CASE OF THE YU-LONG-XUE-SHAN SNOW MOUNTAIN AS THE LANDMARK FOR THE OLD TOWN OF LIJIANG

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Introduction

World cultural heritage concentrates mostly on the preservation of culturally important relics, towns, and buildings. On the other hand, their surrounding natural elements tend to be overlooked and their preservation often lacks careful consideration. Many experts point out that this ignorance may lead to the gradual erosion of not only the world cultural heritage's setting in itself, but also endanger the whole heritage site as an integrated whole. This happens usually when people understand the natural settings from a biased and unitary way.

In reaction to this tendency, we propose the concept of "Comprehensive image of natural settings" for the world cultural heritage sites. By this we mean that the natural settings may expose an abundant storage of cultural meanings for the heritage itself and could be utilized by people in various ways. All these meanings and usages as well as their various physical or unphysical forms should be collected or recollected comprehensively.

Upon grasping a comprehensive image, the cultural heritage may surpass the status of being merely viewed as an independent property, and is no more as static or unitary as commonly regarded. It becomes more meaningful by integrating with its surrounding natural settings, because its abundant cultural meanings can be decoded not in one specific way, but rather in various ways corresponding to the multiple aspects of its natural settings. Thus, the cultural heritage becomes a multi-sided, multi-layered property full of meaningful variations.

Therefore, we argue in this paper that it is important to understand and to preserve the cultural heritage together with its natural settings as a comprehensive image. Nevertheless, it is practically difficult to include every natural setting element as the conservation object of the cultural heritage. What we must always keep in mind are those most important landmarks as the background. It is important to find and preserve comprehensive images of the natural settings more strategically.

Concept of Comprehensive Image

For the world cultural heritages, their natural setting elements often represent various cultural meanings that coexist and act in an integrated way. This is a kind of "Zero-degree" status according the philosophers, which does not mean the status of "zero" that is deficient of something, rather it is a concentration of abundant resources in their initial ways. Many preserved natural and cultural heritages can be regarded as in this status. They are full of potential possibilities and hidden meanings from various aspects. This is also how they are highly valued.

However, people tend to emphasis some aspects while ignore others consciously or unconsciously. Because the many different meanings of the zero-degree heritages might be useful for different occasions and different people in the long run, it is dangerous to exaggerate only a few of the original meanings while ignoring others. In the practical world, this phenomenon can be seen in many cultural heritage sites. For example, many cultural heritage sites as well as their surrounding natural areas have been developed

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into hot tourism areas. Most of the new developments targets mainly on economical gain and emphasis on some superficial meanings and practical benefit of the cultural heritage sites, while the many other meanings of the cultural heritage tend to be neglected or even concealed.

Based upon the above understanding, we hope that the concept of comprehensive image could help better preserve the cultural heritage and their natural settings as an integrated whole. The comprehensive image reflects all aspects of the natural setting elements. Here, we use the word “image” as the kind of media that contains cultural meanings. The comprehensive image might include:

1. Visible images like paintings, photos, etc.
2. Oral or literal images like books, stories, myths, etc.
3. Psychological or spiritual images like the impression, people’s description, etc.

In this paper, we examine how the comprehensive images work together to make a complex cultural system for the landscape setting of Lijiang, and we will further examine the many methods to preserve these comprehensive images as a whole.

The old town of Lijiang and Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain

The concept of comprehensive image can be well illustrated in the case of the old town of Lijiang, which was designated in 1997 as a world cultural heritage site. It is famous for its vernacular houses, curved narrow street pattern, and the well equipped canal system that still functions in the local people’s daily life, along with its nearby villages and other properties like temples and paintings that represent the local Naxi people’s culture.

Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County is situated in the centre of Lijiang valley, surrounded on all sides by mountains in the Northwest Plateau of Yunnan Province in Southwest China (at an altitude of 2,416m). The central town is Dayan; seat of the Prefecture Administration Office, which incorporates the old town of Lijiang. The total land area of Dayan (the whole area including the new town) is 56.1k m², with a total population of 69,230. The area of the old town, which is registered as a world heritage site is about 3.8k m², with a population count of 14,477 in 4,146 dwellings (as of March 2000).

The old town of Lijiang has a long history of about 800 years; its construction beginning at the end of the Song Dynasty Period. Being located in a central trading area, it has since developed as a commercial town. Its historical and

cultural background in both the worship of nature, based on the “*Dongba* religion” (a native religion that is special to the *Naxi* people, which puts emphasis on the worship of nature), and the assimilated cultures of neighboring *Tibetans*, *Bais* and *Hans* is very different.

The old town of Lijiang is also bestowed with a rich natural landscape setting composed of snow mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, etc. Among them, Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain is one of the most important natural landmarks.

Although Lijiang is highly valued as a world cultural heritage, it is impossible to subsist and develop without the Yulongxueshan as its natural setting. The drinking water and other materials mainly come from the Yulongxueshan area. Because people have given it many cultural meanings, Yulongxueshan has therefore become not only an important natural setting, but also an important cultural setting. For Lijiang city, the various symbolic as well as practical meanings of Yulongxueshan should be realized as a whole. These meanings are reflected in various images from either artificial or literature resources. All these images might be of totally different forms, but they help to understand how people view the Yulongxueshan from different approaches. From these view points, people could get comprehensive understanding of this complex property.

The Yulongxueshan snow mountain has multiple facets of natural, cultural, and practical characteristics.

First, as a physical existence, the Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain appears special and outstanding. The natural history of Yulongxueshan dates back to the ice age. There are abundant biological diversities in the mountain. Many mineral materials are also hidden there. Its ever changing appearances are said to have various symbolic metaphors representing the existence of either benign or evil strengths. Many worshiped sacred sites of the deeply local-rooted traditional religion of *Donba* are distributed there.

Although the cultural history of Yulongxueshan is very short compared with its natural history, it is nevertheless equally important as its natural value. Attribute to its special geography location and its outstanding physical form, it has become a landmark of the town since the town was built hundreds of years ago. It is a symbol for the local people and the travelers. Many people would go and enjoy its views from many different angles and distances. From this, Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain has got a visual meaning.

Yulongxueshan is also a sacred site for the Naxi people,

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having many myths and beliefs. The Baishuitai, sacred site of Dongba religion, sits deep in the mountain valley. There are also many other temples, etc, representing its important status in the local religion. Its image is involved in many aspects of the local people's life. The local culture and the daily life of the Lijiang people connect deeply with the Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain. It is widely known that Yulongxueshan is a "God" mountain of the Naxi people. It is also regarded by the local people as a place called "The third country" where the lovers would go to end their life when their love was facing obstructions from their families or surrounding people in the past.

It is also the material resource for many of the city life goods ranging from food, water to construction materials. Finally, Yulongxueshan is a productive resource for most of the city's buildings and other constructions. The woods of the traditional buildings are taken from the Yulongxueshan area. The famous "Wuhuashi" (five-flower-stone or the color-stone) of the street pavement is also taken from the mountain. Thus, the mountain is directly linked with the city and the people's life in a practical way. People take Yulongxueshan as the resource land like their motherland. They have the tradition of preserving the origin area of the river and other life material, among which Yulongxueshan is one of the most important. From this, Yulongxueshan has got a practical image.

It has been a romantic and heroic figure in many poems and paintings for thousands of years. It has many different names representing its many different characteristics. It appears in most of the city's townscape photos and paintings, showing its symbolic status for the Lijiang city.

Yulongxueshan and the urban structure

The city planning of Lijiang city is also greatly influenced by the existence and the specific position of Yulongxueshan.

Yulongxueshan can be seen as the zero-degree starting point for the Naxi people to locate themselves in the Lijiang city and the surrounding areas. It influenced the local people's spatial sense of their inhabitant area. It locates at the north side of the Lijiang city and has become a symbolic landmark of the city. Although it's at a far distance of 15km from the Lijiang city, its 5699 meter height makes it appear a clear skyline at the background of the Lijiang city. For the local people, it is not only a visual landmark but also spiritually reliable existence like their god or ancestors. This special geographical and psychological character transforms the Naxi people's location sensation from taking the south to taking the north direction instead as the most privileged

direction. Because of the existence of this sacred mountain, the North direction becomes important and sacred, symbolizing god and ancestor. At the same time, the North direction is also regarded as the life source and the water source for the city. It becomes respectable because it is the direction where the river comes from, which brings drinking water into the Lijiang city. This location sensation is different from many other regions in China. Below is a diagram of the Naxi people's spatial sensation:

Due to the different sense of space, the Lijiang city has shown a distinguish city pattern. Many old as well as new roads were designed so as to face to the north and make the Yulongxueshan an eye stop. The city and the mountain form a special landscape pattern and townscape structure. If we take the Lijiang city as a masterpiece of human's work, the Yulongxueshan can be seen as a masterpiece of nature. The two forms a two-pole system composed of a nature end and a human end. In Lijiang, the two combine in an integrated way.

Multiple images of Yulongxueshan

Yulongxueshan Snow Mountain has several different meanings, some of which can be raised as below:

First, the image of Yulongxueshan has a mysterious character. The appearance of Yulongxueshan is ever changing. It is in most cases capped by clouds. It has different appearances in different weather, and each appearance has a different metaphor or meaning. Below is the traditional local Dongba character that represents Yulongxueshan. The Dongba character is one of the few characters that still use symbolic images to represent objects. For Yulongxueshan character, it is reflected as a mountain of silver color with clouds overhead. This represents concisely the color and the climate characteristics of the mountains. Because of its color of silver and white, it shows the characteristics of pure and mysterious. Only very seldom would the clouds let the mountain top to show off. This treasured moment is thus said to reflect the existence of certain great men.

Second, the local people developed a formulated description of Yulongxueshan, which can be seen as not only a visual but also a psychological image of the mountain. The Yulongxueshan is visualized as a series of mountain chain that includes thirteen interconnected peaks. The thirteen peaks align one by one, forming a dancing dragon. This image is the formation cause of the name. Among the series, the very southern end of the mountain chain is Shanzidou peak, which is the one that is most popularly recognized.

People conclude that it is composed of three higher peaks and three lower ones, forming a pyramid image, being solid and strong like a safe guard, reminding psychologically of the linkage between the earthy world and the god, or between the current generations with their ancestors.

Finally, it has a heroic character, which influences the local Naxi people's life and behavior deeply. Yulongxueshan is commonly taken as a god. It is both a god in itself and a place for the gods to live. In the local people's literature and myths, the Yulongxueshan is taken as "The third country", where it is neither heaven nor the hell, but a place in between. The lovers would tend to go there when they face obstruction in continuing their affair.

Many of the Yulongxueshan images appear in the Naxi artifacts and photos. This again advocates the importance of Yulongxueshan for Lijiang's tourism development.

Approaches to preserve the comprehensive image

The comprehensive image could be taken as an overall way of understanding. It also leads to preservation in an integrated way. The preservation of the comprehensive images requires not only the protection of the cultural heritage itself, but also requires preserving them together with their natural settings. In other words, it is important to take the cultural heritage and its natural settings as an integral whole, in a sense of cultural landscape.

For the old town of Lijiang's case, it may be argued that the cultural heritage of the old town exists in two dimensions: one is the cultural heritage in itself; the other is the cultural landscape that includes the surrounding natural setting elements, especially the symbolic landmark of Yulongxueshan.

Despite of the importance of natural settings, there are many new development trends that threaten the formation of comprehensive images. Some new buildings are to the north of the old town of Lijiang do not fit the image well, and block the view corridor in a self-dominated way. In the new town area, the streetscape quality with the Yulongxueshan view is degraded because of the modern buildings paralleling the street.

To prevent further problems, it is therefore necessary to preserve the Yulongxueshan snow mountain area in physical approaches. The mountain along with its geological and biological abundance should be preserved strictly. A well controlled buffer zone should be designated both between

the mountain and the city.

Conclusion

A comprehensive image should be preserved in an integrated way. Yulongxueshan can be seen as a comprehensive image in many senses and should be preserved in both physical and non-physical approaches. Physical approaches include the buildings, streets, and the overall townscape views with the Yulongxueshan as either foreground or background. Non-physical approaches include protecting art types like literature, painting, and other human works that represent Yulongxueshan from different ways. These might be preserved both as tangible objects and as electronic media. The Yulongxueshan can not be fully understood without these different types. In order that the preservation work is more sufficient, the local life style that connects with the Yulongxueshan in various patterns should be respected. In the urban planning field, methods to take Yulongxueshan landmark into consideration should be explored continuously. Both the modern tourism development and the housing development should take the traditional spatial sense as an important element. Modern life styles should keep the linkage with the mountain as much as possible.

Abstract

References

The authors propose a concept of Comprehensive Image of Natural Settings for World Heritage sites. By this we mean that important natural setting elements represent various cultural images that should be understood and preserved in an integrated way.

We take the 5,596-meter-high Yu-long-xue-sh-an Snow Mountain in World Heritage city - Lijiang, Yunan Province, China as a case study. As the city's most important natural setting element, it connects profoundly with the city and is reflected by the local people in multiple ways: 1st, it has a heroic image described constantly in Naxi people's myths and literature; 2nd, it has a symbolic image visualizing as the city's landmark; 3rd, it has a mystery image owing its ever-changing appearance; 4th, it has a practical image as the productive site for many of the city's construction materials and life resources.

In this paper, the authors discuss how the Yu-long-xue-shan Snow Mountain's various images coexist and interact in Lijiang's character, literature, music, artifact, building, and townscape. We will further examine how these images can be preserved and utilized in current city development. All these lead to a comprehensive understanding and preservation of the natural settings for the world heritage sites.

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Table1 The Concept of Space in Lijiang

| | East | West | Middle | South | North |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| The meaning of space | Sun, Light, Life, White | Black, Night, Death | Gods, people, self, Lion Mountain | Water tail, Descendents, Pioneer | Water head, Ancestors, Return |

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Figure1 The location and view of the old town of Lijiang and Yulongxueshan



Figure2 Dongba character of Yulongxueshan and the view from Heilongtan

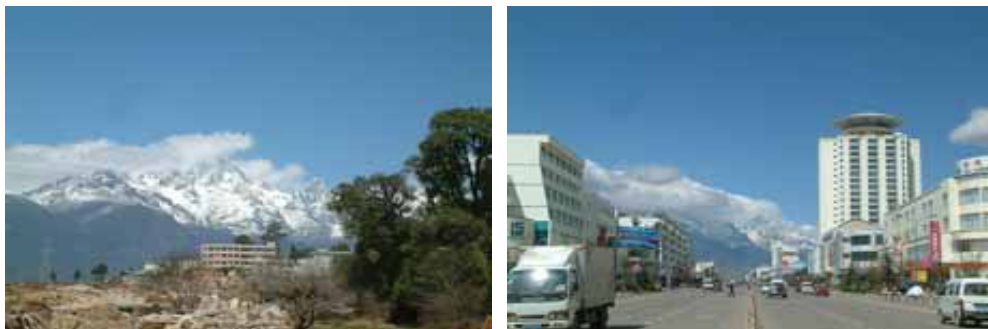


Figure 3 Yulongxueshan as the background of new developments