

## THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON CORE AREA AND BUFFER ZONE: HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE OLD TOWN OF LIJIANG, CHINA

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### **Introduction**

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The tourism industry in historic towns in China such as Lijiang has a significant impact in the built environment, local economics, culture, and the community. Tourism influences city development in both positive and negative ways. Under this situation, urban conservation has its own characteristics. This paper tries to identify the problems brought about by tourism in historic towns, it considers integrated urban conservation and it tries to find out how to manage heritage in a proper way.

Lijiang is one of the most typical tourism towns in China which has undergone major changes in the last 20 years in terms of social, economic and cultural development due to rapid tourism development. It is one of the first towns in China where great conservation efforts have been conducted.

The urban fabric in Lijiang is unique in China because it does not follow the traditional mainstream pattern used by most Chinese cities with grid streets and city walls (See Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3). The urban structure of the old town follows the order of respecting nature. The streets and houses have been built in a way so that they can follow the layout of the land and flow of the rivers. Inhabitants built their houses near the waterways.

### **Urban Conservation in Lijiang—Core Area and Its Buffer Zone**

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#### **1 Master conservation plan for buffer zone in Lijiang**

A buffer zone can be defined as an area surrounding the property which has restrictions placed on its use to give an added layer of protection; the area constituting the buffer

zone should be determined in each case through technical studies<sup>1</sup>

In the Master Conservation Plan for Lijiang, a buffer zone was identified as a transition between the old town and its surroundings. Buffer zone in the west of the old town protects the old town from different townscape in the new town (See Figure 4). The Lion Mountain in the west of the old town lies between the new town and the old town. The northern buffer zone includes Yu river bank. The border of eastern buffer zone and southern buffer zone is along the road.

#### **2 Policy intervention on heritage conservation (See Table 1)**

During the Kuomintang Government and after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, urban conservation was not recognised by the authorities until the year 1951 when a significant decision was made to leave the old town and develop the new town. It saved Lijiang from later mass modern constructions which happened in most historic cities in China since the late 1980s.

In October 1994, a conference held by the provincial government with the topic of Northwest Yunnan tourism planning had significant impact on Lijiang. Firstly, the development strategy about Lijiang city was identified as the tourism industry. Secondly, a decision was made to apply for enlistment as a World Heritage site, which meant that serious conservation work had to begin. Since this year, Lijiang has undergone huge social, cultural, economic changes. The old town of Lijiang, a small town hidden behind mountains is well-known by the world for hosting more than three million visitors a year (2003).

#### **3 Organisation dealing with heritage conservation**

The Heritage Conservation and Management Committee (HCMC) is the conservation office in Lijiang. The HCMC is the one of the first municipal organisations in the local

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1 Operational guidelines for establishment of the world heritage list, UNESCO

government in China which specialised in the conservation of the old town. Its foundation symbolizes the new progress of heritage conservation in China. It is directly under the city government. On the one hand, with the great support from authorities it is easy to implement plans and projects. On the other hand, due to lack of awareness, insufficient professionals, corruption and other factors the decision makers may decide the plans or projects which have negative impact on heritage due to the power of authorities.

### **Impact of Tourism on Core Area and Its Buffer Zone**

Tourism development in Lijiang began when economic reforms in China began. The national policy has a great impact on tourism development. When the Yunnan provincial government decided to develop tourism and construct infrastructure facilities in 1994, the tourist number in 1995 increased 2.8 times than the year before (See Figure 5). In China for a town with a population less than 100,000 like Lijiang, airport construction is rare. Airport construction in Lijiang is ahead of railway and highway construction.

#### **1 The impact of tourism on Lijiang**

The impact of tourism on Lijiang includes social, cultural and economic impact. The impact can be summarized in the table as follows. (Table2)

It can be seen that negative points are more than positive points. (Box1)

#### **2 Commercialisation and government intervention**

The commercialisation in Lijiang is significant. There are some facts.

- A big number of tourism shops and entrepreneurs. In the old town, there are 1,647 entrepreneurs. Only 390 (about ¼) shop owners are local people<sup>2</sup>.
- Low quality of shops and souvenirs. Shops are very similar and the souvenirs lack variety.
- During interviews carried out in 2004, commercialization was mentioned by 27 among the 60 people, which was the biggest number of negative opinions.

Known from interviews, commercialisation is regarded as a significant problem by tourists, residents, local authorities and shop owners. The HCMC issued a policy try to control the shops. Actions taken by the HCMC showed their concern about commercialization of the old town. There are some critiques about their actions by different stakeholders, especially shop owners who were forced to change

ornaments and commodities from time to time. (See Box 2)

Actions taken by the HCMC showed their concern about commercialization of the old town. There are some critiques about their actions by different stakeholders, especially shop owners who were forced to change ornaments and commodities from time to time. (Table3)

### **Problem Identification in Heritage Management in Lijiang**

In heritage management in Lijiang, seven problems are identified and suggestions are given to strengthen conservation and at the same time to improve the state of tourism.

- The problem of authenticity: Lack of awareness about the value of heritage
- Planning problems: Lack of a management plan for the old town
- Maintenance problem: Lack of preventive maintenance for historic fabric
- The problem of interpretation: insufficient information and interpretation of heritage tourism
- The problem of quality: Low quality of the tourism service industry
- The problem of marketing: Lack of cultural activities in the old town
- The problem of organisation: Lack of cooperation between stakeholders

These problems in heritage management are easy to find out but in reality they are complex to implement. The complex relationships among key players in the decision-making process may damage the efficiency in implementation. In China, the identification of heritage has undergone dramatic changes with the changes in the political ideology. Under the highly centralized political system in China, the efficiency of implementation is not a big problem for heritage management, but it is difficult to make the right decisions due to poor professional knowledge and sometimes corruption. It is impossible for these seven problems to cover all the problems in heritage management in Lijiang. The complexity in reality is normally a combination and interaction of several issues.

### **Identify Stakeholders**

#### **1 Who are stakeholders for the old town of Lijiang**

In Lijiang, stakeholders include governments, local residents, visitors, real estate developers, shop owners and others. Local government is decision makers. International

2 Work report from the Heritage Conservation and Management Committee in Lijiang, 2003.

and national professionals provide expertise for heritage management. Tourists cause the problem of deterioration. Local government is the main managers for the old town. Real estate developers and shop owners

### **Governments**

The central government does not have a strong influence in the town. The provincial government issued many policies dealing with the development of the old town. Since the 1990s, the tourism industry has been taken as the main industry in the whole Yunnan Province. The old town of Lijiang is one of the most essential tourism sites. The local government played an important role in implementing policies. Most projects were conducted by the local government. Most officers in the town government are local people. They grew up in the old town and have strong feeling towards the town.

### **Local residents**

Before 1994, local people lived their peaceful life by farming, without much disturbance from outside. Since the tourism boom, a large percentage of local residents took part in the tourism industry in different ways. Some local residents rent their houses to entrepreneurs for business and with the rent they collect, they live in the new town. In the tourism area, almost all the houses are in this category. Some local people do businesses by themselves. Some are employed in the shops run by outsiders. Because of out-migration, only a small number of local people still live in the old town and they are old-aged. According to interviews, they are happy with tourism development.

### **Visitors**

The first visitors to the old town were artists and foreigners. Being in a small number, they did not have a lot of impact on the local society. Mass tourism boom since the year 1994 brought a large number of both package and individual tourists, who contribute to tourism economics.

### **Real estate developers**

They come to Lijiang to get profits from heritage tourism. They regard heritage as a resource for economic profits. They normally cooperate closely with the government to get permission or bonus for real estate projects. Because of the consideration for maximum profits, the authenticity of heritage and the interests of the local community are less considered, or partly damaged in most cases. Compared to shop owners, they are not in a large number, but their projects have bigger impacts on the old town.

### **Shop owners**

There are different types of shop owners.

Type one: Those who seek a romantic life style in Lijiang. Most of the shops they run are cafes and bars. Many have left Lijiang after mass tourism broke the peace and romance of the old town.

Type two: Artists. They run workshops in the old town and sell art works. Similar to type one, they are looking for a life style in Lijiang. They are in a small numbers, but quite remarkable in the old town.

Type three: Professional business men in tourism. Attracted by the large number of tourists in Lijiang, they come here for economic profits. Most of them come from another tourism city. When they come, they also bring souvenirs which are not part of local specialties. They are responsible for the comment that there are shortages in the variety of souvenirs in shops. They sell pearls and jewels some of which are fake. Because of the intense competition, their businesses are not very good.

Type four: Local residents. They are the only group who do not need to pay rent. They sell local food or local souvenirs. They also face intense competition in business.

Some of the shop owners from outside do not care about the environment of the town. For example, they throw garbage in the river at night. Some shop owners are in conflict with the local residents.

### **Others**

National professionals: They are often invited to come to Lijiang for professional opinions. But sometimes their opinions are not respected by the local authorities. There have been many arguments between professionals and the local authorities.

International professionals: The inscription into World Heritage Site stimulated the local authorities for conservation and also brought international professionals. The UNESCO workshop in 2001 was significant in guiding heritage management in Lijiang. Global Heritage Fund provided Lijiang with financial support.

## **2 Interaction of stakeholders**

The cooperation between stakeholders has not been built yet. Since finance influences the decision making process, the local authorities have cooperation with the investors. Some improper development projects were planned by investors and authorized by the local government. (Figure6) (Table4)

## **Evaluation of Heritage Management in Lijiang**

In a nutshell, heritage management in Lijiang is at a transformation stage and at cross-roads to either success or failure. Policy intervention brings both positive and negative impacts and negative impacts began to be realized. Public participation has not yet been developed. The interests of the local communities begin to be paid attention to. The attention for them was initiated by external stakeholders, the GHF (Global Heritage Fund), conservation institutes, shop owners and some tourists, instead of the local authorities.

In Lijiang, great efforts have been made for heritage conservation while improper construction is going on at the same time. There is coexistence between positive development and constraints in Lijiang.

## **Recommendations for Heritage Management in Lijiang**

Guideline control for the built environment is one of the first steps in heritage management. Beyond guidelines, the implementation of guideline needs a sophisticated management system. In reality problems are caused by more than one stakeholder. The solution of problems needs close cooperation between stakeholders. Public and private sectors have different responsibilities. For the old town of Lijiang, the following are the recommendations for different sectors.

### **1 Recommendations for different stakeholders**

- Recommendations for the national government

The national government should strengthen the legal system in the field of urban conservation and develop supportive organizations dealing with urban heritage conservation at the national level, such as National Fund for Urban Heritage Conservation and National Research Centre for Urban Heritage Conservation.

- Recommendations for the Yunnan Provincial Government

The provincial government should support national policies and issue development strategies for urban conservation. The provincial government should ensure that land is properly used in heritage sites when authorizing land development plans for the cities. Urban heritage conservation should be integrated into the whole regional development. A special fund for urban heritage conservation should be established at the provincial level.

- Recommendations for the Lijiang city government

The Lijiang city government should implement national and provincial policies and organize conservation activities. Its responsibilities should include:

*Integrating heritage conservation into the overall city development strategy.*

*Mobilizing funds for heritage conservation.*

*Organizing the management plan for the heritage site*

*Implementing the conservation plan*

Cooperating with professionals in urban conservation and organizing research about heritage conservation

- Recommendations for the HCMC

The HCMC is an organization which is responsible for implementing conservation activities in Lijiang. Its responsibilities include:

*Organizing heritage conservation activities*

*Cooperating closely with experts in heritage management*

*Daily monitoring of conservation work and maintaining historic fabric*

- Recommendations for private sectors

For real estate developers and investors, they conduct projects under the supervision of experts. They provides personal input which would enable them to get profits and this would in turn contribute to urban conservation.

- Recommendations for the property owners

Property owners who own historic buildings put efforts on restoration. They contribute both to their profits and conservation.

## **2 Improvement of management**

Compared to the present situation, this model could improve on the following issues:

- Real estate developers are expected to conduct projects which contribute both to their profits and heritage conservation. This would amount to a significant contribution to heritage conservation by real estate developers.
- The property owners are expected to be well integrated into the whole urban heritage conservation system. Their interests should be integrated in real estate development. Their relationship with real estate developers should not be hostile but cooperative.
- It is recommended that the close co-operation between the private sector and the public sector should be strengthened.
- It is recommended that a committee of experts should be strengthened, unlike before, when their opinions were not fully taken into consideration. Experts are expected to have a close cooperation with the site management committee.
- An heritage conservation system at national level is expected to be established. National urban heritage conservation laws and policies should be established. In addition to this, a national urban heritage conservation fund should be set up and a heritage research centre should be developed.

- Similar to the national heritage conservation system, a system at the provincial level should be developed which includes urban heritage conservation laws, policies, conservation funds and a conservation research centre.

This considers the long term goal of heritage conservation which results into the overall development of the towns and makes profits for different groups.

### **Concluding remarks**

Conservation of historic towns involves seeking a delicate balance between competing priorities for social, cultural and economic development. This balance needs to be monitored and continuous efforts must be put in place to maintain this balance. If the old town of Lijiang keeps developing in the right way and being attractive, the other historic towns will see the hope and learn how to balance between heritage conservation and economic development. For historic towns in China, one successful example of heritage conservation in the same country is much more effective than the numerous successful examples in Europe or other foreign countries.

The implementation of these recommendations and the establishment of a national heritage conservation system is a long-term process. If they begin to establish this system, the intervention on the old town would be in a sustainable way. The town acts not only as a cultural exchange center for tourists, but also as a paradise for the local community.

### **Abstract**

This paper deals with heritage management with emphasis on solution for the impact of mass tourism on the old town of Lijiang in China. The paper identifies the impact of tourism on the restricted conservation area and its setting-----buffer zone area. The paper analyzes stakeholders behind those impacts and intervention on heritage by the local authorities. Finally, based on the previous research the paper demonstrates how to improve the present situation and how to integrate heritage management into social, economic and cultural development by the different stakeholders at different management levels.

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Figure 1: The location of the Lijiang City in China. Edited by author.



Figure 2: A bird-eye view of the old town

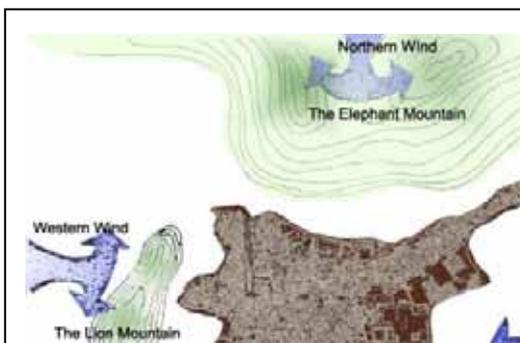


Figure 3: The old town and the natural environment

The northern and western mountain of the old town can resist wind coming from the north and south in winter.

While the town is open in the south and east so that in summer wind can come to the town.

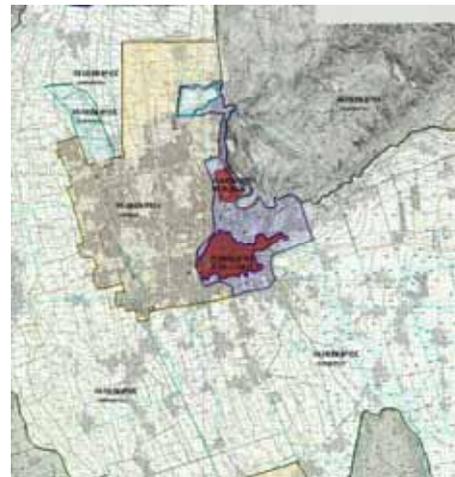


Figure 4: The core area and its buffer zone of the old town of Lijiang.

Source: Lijiang Master Conservation Plan

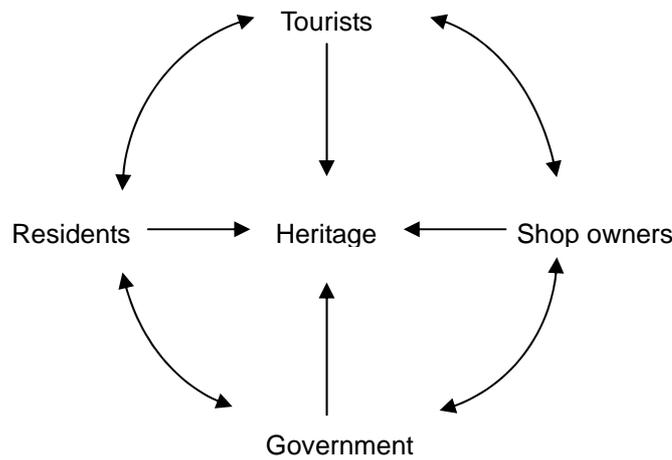


Figure6: The interaction between tourists, residents, shop owners, government and heritage

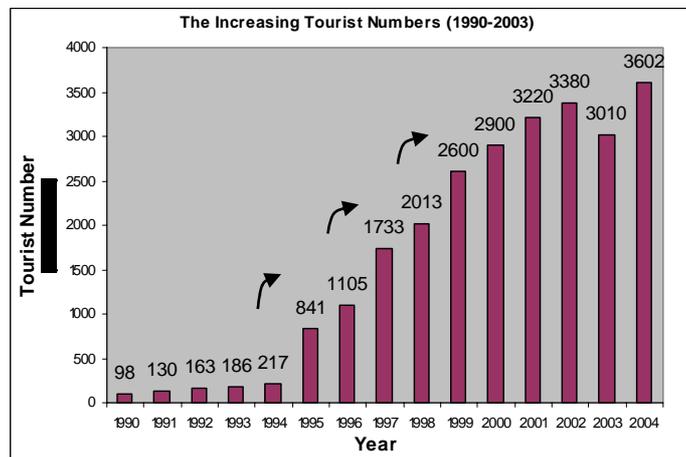


Figure 4: The increasing tourist numbers (1990-2003)

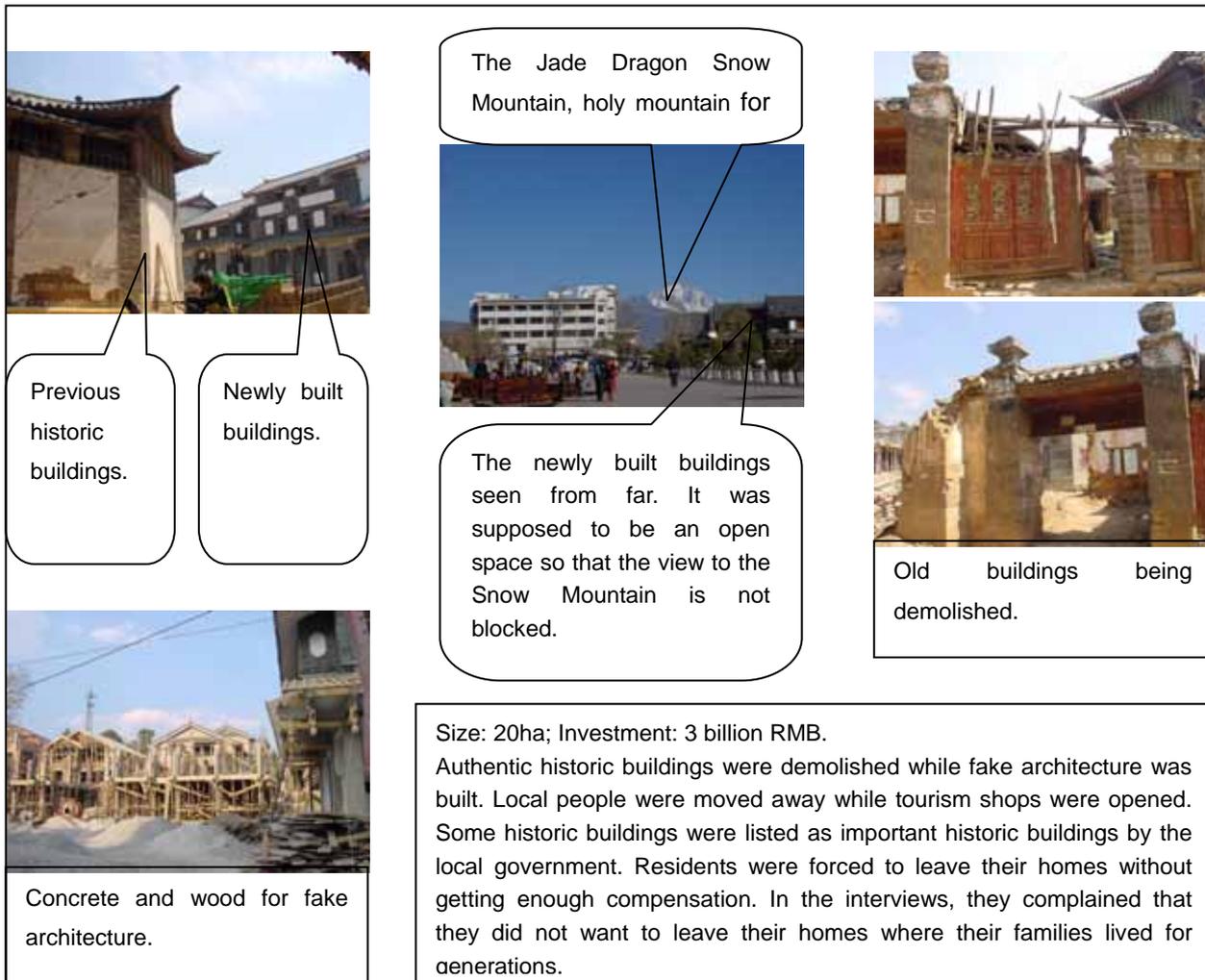
Source: The Lijiang yearbooks 1990-2003, edited by author

►: The significant increase in tourist numbers.

1994-1995: A conference in 1994 promoted infrastructure construction for tourism.

1996-1997: An earthquake broke out in Lijiang. It damaged some of the buildings in Lijiang, but most of the fabric remained unchanged. The flexibility of wooden structures in Lijiang showed its big charm during this earthquake. There was a big boom in that year in spite of earthquake.

1998-1999: The co-hosting of the World Expo together with Kunming promoted tourism.



The Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, holy mountain for

Previous historic buildings.

Newly built buildings.

The newly built buildings seen from far. It was supposed to be an open space so that the view to the Snow Mountain is not blocked.

Old buildings being demolished.

Concrete and wood for fake architecture.

Size: 20ha; Investment: 3 billion RMB.  
 Authentic historic buildings were demolished while fake architecture was built. Local people were moved away while tourism shops were opened. Some historic buildings were listed as important historic buildings by the local government. Residents were forced to leave their homes without getting enough compensation. In the interviews, they complained that they did not want to leave their homes where their families lived for generations.

Box 2: Government intervention on tourism to attract tourists.



In the tourism area, waterways are clean. Fishes were put inside by the HCMC. Without sand and grass at the bottom of the river, It is difficult for fish to stay.



In the residential area, waterways are dirty and full of trash. Banks with natural soils still exist. Stones and plants can be seen at the bottom.



In the tourism area, 50,000 uniform plants were put at the entrance of each shop, which got much criticism from different groups.

**Tourism area is beautified while residential area is overlooked.**

Photos by author, edited by author.

Box 1: The Improper Reconstruction Project ----- Yu River Bank Reconstruction Project

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**Table 1: Policies dealing with heritage conservation in Lijiang**

Year	Conservation policy	Authorities	significance
1951	Development of the new town, conservation of the old town	The old town government	significant decision
1983	Identification: the conservation of the old town in the Lijiang county master plan	The old town government	Identification
1994	<b>Application for enlistment as a world heritage site</b>	Provincial government	Significant, turning point
	Lijiang conservation and management regulations	Provincial government	Further development
1995	Lijiang historic town conservation master plan	Provincial government	The first conservation plan
	Lijiang old town fire control safety regulations	The old town government	Infrastructure
	The enlistment of 140 important courtyard households	The old town government	Traditional architecture
1997	The restoration project due to earthquake	The city government	Significant
2001	House and business management regulations in the old town	The old town government	Society intervention
2001	The UNESO workshop: Lijiang Model concerning conservation and tourism development, held in Lijiang	The city government	Promotion for conservation
2002	Foundation of the HCMC	The city government	Organisation significance
2002	The development of the Lijiang Master Conservation Plan	the HCMC	Planning significance
2003	Permission regulations for shop running	the HCMC	Tourism controlling
	Development of Naxi language curriculum in primary schools. Grade one to grade four, two classes every week	people's congress of the old town	Considering local culture
	Provide free houses to for local cultural presentations	the HCMC	Considering local culture
	Establishment of resident service centre to help local residents for transportation	the HCMC	Considering about local people

Source: Author's summary, based on the HCMC work report

HCMC: The Heritage Conservation and Management Committee in Lijiang

**Table 2: The summary of the main tourism impact on Lijiang.**

	Positive	Indicators	E	Negative	Indicators	E
<b>Economic impact</b>	Income for local economy	Industry proportion change Primary : secondary : tertiary Year 1990: 0.5: 0.2: 0.3 Year 2000: 0.3: 0.3: 0.4	3	Gentrification	Commodity price in the old town is higher than in the new town	- 1
		15,000 directly employed and 50,000 indirectly employed in tourism industry	2			
<b>Social and cultural impact</b>	Awareness about value of heritage	In interviews, 3 out of 20 mentioned this point.	2	Out migration of local people	Population of outsiders is 1/3 of total population	- 2
		A course about traditional culture is introduced to schools.	2			
<b>Physical impact</b>	Awareness about value of traditional architecture	Few historic houses have been restored.	1	<b>Deterioration of the natural environment</b>	<b>Rapidly melting snow in the Yulong Snow Mountain.</b>	- 2
					<b>loss of land for agriculture</b>	- 1
					<b>deterioration of the quality of water</b>	- 1
				expansion of the built area	almost all the area surrounding the old town has been developed into a tourism service industry.	- 1
					It is planned that by the year 2020, 300,000 people will live in Lijiang City with an annual population growth of 18.5%!	- 1
				improper reconstruction in the old town	Nanmen reconstruction project	- 1
	popularity of fake architecture	The style of some hotels	- 1			

			the function change of physical settlement	The function change of the central market square. It is occupied by tourists.	- 1
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E: Evaluation by weight of importance. 1: important; 2: very important; 3: extremely important.

Positive points: 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 = 9;

Negative points: -1 - 2 - 2 - 1 - 1 - 1 - 1 - 1 - 1 - 1 = -12

**Table 3: Critiques about shop control by the HCMC**

Attitude by author	Actions	Reason
approved	shop number control	Reduce shops
	Job opportunities for the local people	Protect local communities
	special shops rent free for cultural celebrities	Promote traditional local culture
disapproved	shop commodity type control	Theme park
	ethnic costume	Theme park
	Ornament control	Uniformities and standardization

Source: Author's summary, based on interviews and questionnaire surveys.

**Table 4: The interaction between tourists, residents, shop owners, government and heritage**

Heritage	Tourists	Residents	Shop owners	Government
	<b>Tourists vs. Heritage</b>	<b>Residents vs. Tourists</b>	<b>Shop Owners vs. Tourists</b>	<b>Government vs. Tourists</b>
Tourists	Basically, satisfied with heritage, but complaining about the loss of authenticity and the theme park phenomena	Resident open to tourists, but complaining about the loss of identity, crowds, disturbance, and environmental pollution.	Expecting more and more tourists	Government promotes tourism and tries to attract tourists.
	<b>Tourists vs. Residents</b>	<b>Residents vs. Heritage</b>	<b>Shop Owners vs. Residents</b>	<b>Government vs. Residents</b>
Residents	Most tourists are polite to residents. But some not.	They highlighted the loss of identity and tradition	Shop owners mentioned the loss of identity and tradition by tourism. Too much commerce and bad quality of souvenirs.	Government tries to attract the local residents to live in the old town.

Shop owners	<p><b>Tourists vs. shop owners</b></p> <p>Tourists complain about commercialization</p>	<p><b>Residents vs. shop owners</b></p> <p>Residents are open to shop owners.</p>	<p><b>Shop owners vs. heritage</b></p> <p>They highlighted the loss of authenticity.</p>	<p><b>Government vs. shop owners</b></p> <p>Government intervenes in the market and tries to regulate commercial activities.</p>
Government	<p><b>Tourists vs. government</b></p> <p>Tourists are satisfied with the environment in the old town.</p>	<p><b>Residents vs. government</b></p> <p>Residents get subsidies and permission from the government for restoration.</p>	<p><b>Shop owners vs. government</b></p> <p>Some shop owners complained about government's action.</p>	<p><b>Government vs. heritage</b></p> <p>Government conserves heritage and promotes tourism</p>

Source: Author's summary based on interviews

**Table 5: Assessment of conservation efforts**

Effective conservation efforts	Improper development efforts
Infrastructure construction in the old town	Improper real estate development: (Nanmen Reconstruction Project, Yu River Reconstruction Project)
Awareness of conservation has improved among authorities	Theme park actions

Source: Author's summary based on interviews