

Heritage Landscape Conservation and Development

Jia Guo

Yunnan Provincial Museum, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China
guojia.hope@hotmail.com

Abstract. Development and conservation are key issues in cultural heritage management. This paper focuses on the emblematic heritage landscapes' management practice in west and east, on the basis of field interviews, interpretation of oral history records, archives and secondary literature as well as relevant cartographic analysis; it explores the unavoidable impact caused by the Heritage Site designation on heritage landscape, people, and its intangible or tangible culture. It demonstrates the relationship between the cultural landscape and the people who reside there and some of the core issues for local communities and heritage managers and concludes that such "defined places" should have a sustainable relationship between people's lives in their developing home place and the heritage designation, rational understanding is needed to evaluate sustainable conservation and development in such heritage landscapes.

Keywords: Heritage Landscape, Cultural Heritage, People and Place, Conservation and Development.

1 Introduction

The current concept of "landscape" originated from the interpretation of landscape paintings in the sixteenth and seventh centuries [14]. In the early nineteenth century, the term "landscape" was introduced into the field of geography, started the rise of the geographical and ecological landscape research [8]. Then it received further development in anthropogenic and cultural geography in the twentieth century. The term "cultural landscape" was promoted in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s [5]. As Muir commented:

Landscapes exist as historical texts; the historical aspects of landscape combine with aesthetic and place-related elements to constitute landscape as heritage, and landscape is a significant component of the overall heritage which endows communities and nations with their identity. The heritage landscape is a cultural product so that its preservation and maintenance would concern the conservation of a culture rather than of countryside [7].

In 1972, the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage declared that the purpose of the Convention was to ensure the

identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of cultural and natural heritages of “outstanding universal value”. Up to July 2013, a total of 981 sites have been nominated as World Heritage Sites on a global scale. Obtaining the designation has become a target of many countries and authorities because of the potential social and economic benefits from its “universal value”. The designation of a place as a World Heritage Site will, on many occasions, enhance public interest as well as local pride; local people may like to hear that the place they live in is considered to be of “outstanding universal value”; it may go without saying that this is presuming that, the place as well as the associated culture is not robbed by such a designation. Unfortunately, such heritage designations can in all probability impact physically, culturally (tangible and intangible), environmentally, economically and socially on far more than just the site itself including on the lives and livelihoods of local communities and there are many examples of this worldwide, some of which are referred to for comparative purposes in this study.

2 Designation of a Heritage Landscape

Undoubtedly, the “heritage landscape” is an inevitable outcome of human civilization; it is also an important composition of the sustainable development of our human being. The inscription of a World Heritage Site is more than a glorious title; it comes with many accessories and responsibilities. When people’s home place becomes a “heritage landscape”, the relationship between people and their place is no longer just the interplay between them, but often many more social elements are in the mix.

To some extent, the designation of these heritage landscapes is regarded as a double-edged sword for the states nominated. From the state’s point of view, their every action should follow the guidelines of UNESCO and be put under the supervision of international communities. That means the state’s management of the area has to be manifestly integrative, considerate and balanced. States should always regularize their behaviors because what they do might be seen as an international event. After nomination by UNESCO, the state’s management is open to all sectors of the public associated with the World Heritage Site; they will be appraised by officials, professionals as well as visitors from different angles of review. The public supervision, in other words, is a kind of intangible pressure. To some extent, states with World Heritage Sites “hand over” partial authority to the public, to a world-wide platform. It is indeed a big challenge to the nominating state. In a changing and developing global society, not only local residents feel the pressure, the authorities also recognize limitations of the World Heritage Site status.

The event of the removal of Germany’s Dresden Elbe River Valley from the World Heritage Site list is a good example of an extreme one, of the conflict between the state and international supervision, which is actually one expression of the conflict between development and conservation of cultural landscapes in a changing world.

In 2009, the World Heritage Committee decided to remove Germany’s Dresden Elbe Valley from UNESCO’s World Heritage list due to the building of Waldschlößchen Bridge in the heart of its cultural landscape; it meant that the heritage landscape failed to keep the “universal value” of the valley which had been protected [13].

This controversial bridge caused Germany the embarrassment of being the first European country to lose a heritage site and only the second in the world. Before it, Oman was struck from the list after reducing the size of its World Natural Heritage-Oryx Antelope Sanctuary by 90 percent for oil exploration, causing a drastic decline in the antelope population [12].

In 2004, the Dresden Elbe Valley as a developing cultural landscape was inscribed on the World heritage list. This large-scale landscape made up of many elements, such as culture, history, spirit of humanity, environment, nature, geography, aesthetics of architecture, people's living etc. It was recognized as an example of the form of settlement of a European residence developed through the centuries. To a large extent, the core of this landscape is the continuous interplay between nature and artifice in the context of Dresden's development as a city. Neither the landscape nor the man-made structures are of such high value that they would qualify for the World Heritage designation of approval; it is the co-relationship of those elements qualified them for World Heritage status.

On behalf of the local authorities, the German administration decided to walk the road of development when they were standing at the crossroads of conservation or development. It is believed that the bridge was an infrastructural necessity which had been planned and considered in the overall context of the city and the landscape for over a century (Fig. 1, 2); it has yet not been completed for historical reason, the outbreak of war. The river valley is also a place where the citizens earning their living. The local government debated that the need to build a bridge was the overwhelming will of the people, and over half of citizens voted in favor of the bridge construction.

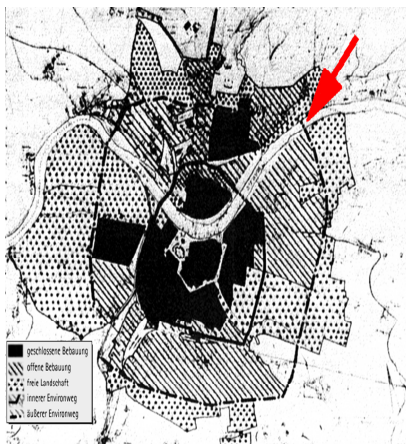


Fig. 1. (left) General development plan in 1862 and predicted location of Waldschlößchen Bridge

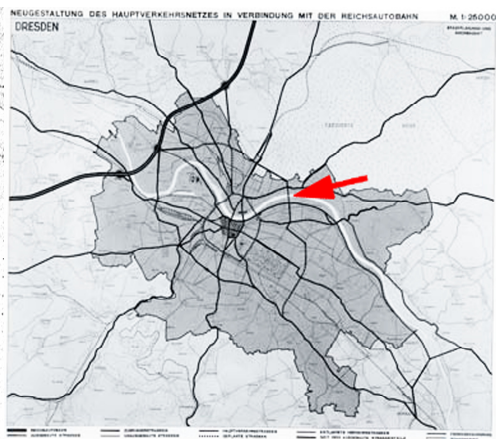


Fig. 2. (right) Transport route plan in 1937 and predicted location of Waldschlößchen Bridge

The removal of the World Heritage Site designation is regretful and shouldn't happen if shared understanding can be reached. Of course, the negative impact of large-scale infrastructure construction on the heritage landscape cannot be denied, but it is rational to see that not all social transformations are caused by the construction, since our society is everlastingly changing.

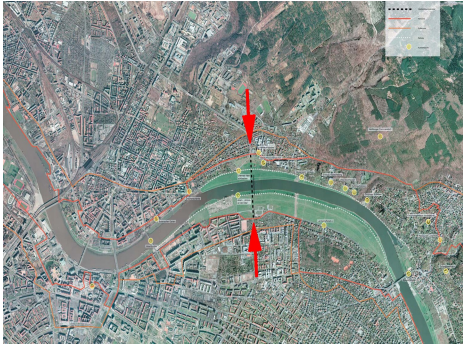


Fig. 3. (left) Satellite remote sensing digital image of the Elbe River valley and location of Waldschlößchen Bridge



Plate 1. (right) Overview of the Elbe River valley in Dresden, Germany

To some extent, the expectations of UNESCO or relative general public supervision should not operate to interfere in the local communities' right to alive, or even to prevent "normal" economic development. The World Heritage Site designation was not only granted to a specific element in a context, but to a living, working heritage landscape involving people's everyday lives. Yet, the public's absence of awareness about the heritage site conservation and its importance resulted really from the insufficient supervised of the local ruling authorities. World Heritage Site status involves a solemn responsibility, regulation and execution. The attitude of the ruling authorities towards the management of the heritage landscape will also impact on people's behavior to their newly "defined place".

According to the Operational Guideline 2011, II.F [11], there are ways that proper protection and management can work on heritage landscapes:

109. The purpose of a management system is to ensure the effective protection of nominated property for present and future generations.

119. World Heritage properties may support a variety of ongoing and proposed uses that are ecologically and culturally sustainable, and which may contribute to the quality of life of communities concerned.....promote and encourage the active participation of the communities and stakeholders concerned with the property as necessary conditions to its sustainable protection, conservation, management and presentation.

123. States Parties are encouraged to prepare nominations with the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, including site managers, local and regional governments, local communities, NGOs and other interested parties.

However, on many occasions, the management of a World Heritage Site is carried out on a level where ordinary people and non-governmental forces cannot reach. The regional governments and local communities normally have no chance to express their suggestions. We should try to understand people's authentic and basic desires, and think about whether there is an alternative method to satisfy regional governments and local communities' needs, as well as, the needs of higher conservators.

Management is a part of the developing process of a heritage landscape; it is quite a difficult task, particularly if it is done properly. For a heritage landscape, "the complex historical, ethnic identity and economic factors affected regeneration on a more general level, and led to a lack of direction and coordination in the development of a heritage product" [10]. The complexity of a cultural heritage landscape means that its management should be quite a drawn-out process, to allow time for critical site assessment, professional advice, public consultation and "getting everyone on board".

3 People and Defined Place

On many occasions, when we think of what we mean by a "place", we picture a settled community, a locality with a distinct character: physical, economic and cultural [6].

Designated as a heritage landscape, the universal title attracts attention from all over the world; undoubtedly, the defined name exposes what may often be small scale, semi-isolated communities un-used to so much contact with a wider public.

Sponsored by Irish government's Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Archaeology, National University of Ireland, Galway, in 2012, I conducted a field interview in the Nu River Valley, core area of the protected Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Province in China.

Deemed as the largest World Heritage Site in China, few regions can be compared with the Three Parallel Rivers Area in Yunnan Province which is situated in south-west China (Fig. 4); it is regarded as a wellspring for life on earth and a place with millennia of human history and was designated as a Natural World Heritage Site in 2003. There are around 315,000 people have been living in this protected landscape for hundreds years, when it was nominated in 2003, UNESCO declared that "the justification for inscribing a series of areas to represent this diversity is due to the fact that the area has been modified by human activities over thousands of years". Nominated for its natural features, we should note that the "natural landscape" in this region was in fact created by a specific sequence of civilization; it can be seen as a modification of nature with its tangible and intangible culture.



Fig. 4. Map of the location of the Three Parallel Rivers area in China

Following UNESCO's guidelines, the regional protection regulations for this World Heritage Site were enforced [15]. The natural reserves in the area were divided into core, buffer and trial zones. In the Three Parallel Rivers area, 58.3% of the territory of the Nu River valley was included in the protected core area owing to its "universal value". In contrast to its abundant natural resources, bio-diversity and geological features, the social environment is underdeveloped and the poverty of people's lives is striking. The boundary setting is a standard protection method of heritage landscape management; however, to the local communities (534,337 people in 2011) [1], it means exclusion from the place where they live because of this contrived barrier between natural and cultural expectations of what a World Heritage Site should be. The reality is more complex. On the one hand, the local communities lose the basic resources for their daily lives, as well as the right to manage and use the resources; this limitation makes the development of local people, all their relationships and their communities harder. On the other hand, the hunting, grazing, and farming practices that were part of people's lives have now become illegal; many people have lost the sense they had of their land and their relationship with it, a cultural as much as an economic relationship. As a result, the pressure of livelihood has impelled them to exact from the protection zone continuously; the way in which this is changing people, their relationships, and their connection to the landscape and their cultural heritage is the subject of my investigations below:

3.1 Case Study: Wengli, the Heritage Site Suspended in Time

Wengli is a settlement cluster of Qiunatong village in Gongshan County in the Nu River Valley. It has a population of 215; they are mainly Nu people with a minority made up of the Lisu and Tibetan ethnicities. In total 53 families and their traditional wooden houses occupy the largest mesa in this region.

The people in Wengli have been living by slash-and-burn farming along the hills' edge for hundreds years, the local people who live in poverty are used to utilizing the natural resources to support their daily lives; they preserve the traditional way of house-building with stone, wood and bamboo, and arrange the houses according to the topography and their understanding of the natural landscape. Because of the well preserved architectural complexes, the settlement cluster of Wengli was listed as a provincial-level cultural protected area in 2011 by the local government [2][3].



Plate 2. (left) View of traditional architectural complexes of the Nu people in Wengli



Plate 3. (right) View inside a house in Wengli settlement

In the Nu River valley, various ethnic groups have diverse rituals, folk music, songs and dances related to their farming and building practices. These intangible components arise from the perceptions of local people, and are the expressions of their relationships within the community and their interactions with the place. The Nu people have unique rituals and prayers about migration, settlement and development. Traditionally, house-building is considered an important activity because local people believe that the house is a carrier of their ethnicity culture, religion and family inheritance. They often name their newly-built house with the names of surrounding plants or geographical characteristics in order to please the spirits of the mountain, river, forests or particular stones in that place and to receive peace and abundance in their lives.

In 2003, Wengli became part of the World Heritage Site. This designation attracted the attention of people from all over the world. In order to attract more tourists, the local authorities changed the name of the district into the more artistic “Wuli”, which means “being in the fog” in Chinese, while the original meaning of Wengli derives from the body of traditional knowledge in the language of the Nu people. The shift in name of the World Heritage Site dislocated people from their place where fills with experience and memories.

The development of tourism may improve the income of local communities or some in the communities to some extent. At the same time, the changing environment also changes people’s way of thinking and their relationships with each other. With improvements to life, the traditional houses with stone-panel roofs and wooden walls may no longer satisfy people who live in a tough environment. Some people in Wengli planned to repair their old houses or rebuild them in order to accommodate the growing tourist market. However, according to the World Heritage Site regulations, “the residence architecture should maintain the tradition of local ethnic groups” [16]. The regulation is too strict for local communities to build any house with modern materials like asbestos tiles, concrete walls and hollow bricks which are believed to have a negative impact on the environment. It is true that asbestos is recognized as a hazardous

material but this is all that is available to local people. Some villagers decided to move out from the protected area in order to build their new houses without limitation. However, the local cultural officials became worried that if no one lived in the settlement, the cultural tradition of the wooden house would disappear. So they tried to convince the villagers to stay and posed obstacles to their relocation in order to preserve the traditional forms of architecture and land-use.

However, the efforts of the archaeological conservators were not accepted by the villagers; they felt confused that the protection regulation seemed like an imprisonment to them.

This work often gives offence to the local communities; many people complain to the local government that we didn't support the development of their life (local person who works on cultural relics conservation, interviewed May 25, 2012).

Here may be a kind of divergent understanding between the authorities and the local residents; the preservation of “traditional forms of architecture and land-use” is not equivalent to the protection of the interests and needs of the local communities. People are not exhibition specimens but living beings that are part of and, in fact, helped to make this heritage landscape, and are continuing to try to gain a livelihood in their place.

“Of course, I want a new house, everybody wants to have a better life”, “the people’s life is too hard, and how can we put our eyes to so-called conservation?” These words were repeated to me many times by the local villagers in the Nu River valley. The “defined place” creates a barrier between natural and cultural expectations for designated World Heritage sites. Different components of a landscape are treated in a discriminatory or hierarchical fashion, when they should be seen as a totality. More generally, the legally or quasi-legally defined boundaries obstruct the livelihood and culture of people who have been excluded from natural or cultural landscapes. The relationship between people and the place is cut. These defined places become exhibitions of “placeless” places, which fail to reflect the unique or local way of going on in the immediate surroundings.

When it comes to the prospects for landscape, it is really hard to define and predict its future. “No one can know how cultural geographies of landscape will develop in the future, or even, it could be argued, if they will develop”, as Wylie says [14]. What we can do is examine the effects of policy and practice in relation to protected landscapes in specific cases.

As we understood from the case of Wengli, the protection didn’t quit the poverty of the local communities, and they lost their immediate interests because of the execution of restrictions. It is reasonable for the local people to have their request for improving their quality of life. Nobody has the right to order certain people to sacrifice themselves for the world environment as well as for somebody’s enjoyment or research on their place and culture. “Development is not just a right but a necessity for all of us on the planet, but it is clear that as it is currently carried out by governments and corporations, much development does not benefit most people” [9]. “There is the absence of genuine local community and cultural involvement in heritage site management. Without communities’ involvement and a sense of ownership in locally based heritage, any investment may create resentment of more subtle but nonetheless destructive practices

of heritage development” [4]. The key issue is to find out a sustainable mechanism to ensure necessary participation of local communities and their equitable sharing of the benefits of heritage landscape.

Development or conservation of heritage will continue to be a key issue in World Heritage Site management. In the cases of the Three Parallel Rivers area in Yunnan, China and Dresden’s Elbe valley, Germany, we can see these conflicts played out and behind them, the wishes and struggles of the local communities. Fowler [5] once debated that, “a designated place has to have a past, to be of any value; it should also have a future, which I believe is of importance to ourselves and offspring to contemplate tomorrow”.

Conclusions

Conservation and development in Dresden’s Elbe valley and the Three Parallel Rivers World Heritage Site are typical cases of the conflicts that regularly occur between environment and culture, people and the heritage landscape in the world today. Such case studies are worth exploring because more World Heritage Sites may be involved in the same conflicts, and we must understand the nature of the problems people experience in these “defined places”.

Construction and development is a reality in our world and some of it is required in order to meet the livelihood desires of local communities but, on many occasions, there are very negative impacts, which may be natural or cultural (tangible and intangible). The different sectors of society involved in heritage landscape management all have their limitations which may result in biased understanding or the enforcement of conservation and development measures in an inappropriate way. It is also true to say that many such situations are complex and extremely difficult to deal with.

When considering development schemes in such cultural landscapes, sufficient conservation awareness and a high degree of responsibility to the heritage landscape and its resident communities is needed to evaluate positive and negative impacts. However, as the evidence in case study has shown, this frequently does not occur. This exploration has also shown that one particular problem with heritage landscapes is their failure to treat places as “living landscape”. It is rational for us to keep in mind that when a place is nominated as a World Heritage Site, it should not be seen as merely the refuge of nature or traditional, unchanging societies or a shrine to a landscape of inertia. There must be room for livelihood, innovation as well as sustainable development.

There have been many debates on these problems and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop an all-embracing comprehensive solution, but I hope to provide some suggestions. Faced with the conflict between local livelihood desires and heritage landscape conservation, the management of a heritage landscape should take the immediate interests of the local communities into consideration. Since different sectors of society have different desires, an ideal sustainable development in such landscapes is not that easy to realize, but a range of economic, cultural and social strategies which may not necessarily impair the heritage landscape is needed. A sustainable relationship between people’s home place and the “World Heritage Site” designation should be built in order for life to keep developing in a specific heritage landscape. The starting point must be the people who create the unique cultural context of the landscape.

We don't want to damage a heritage landscape by tying it up in external mishandling, including bureaucratic inertia and expediency or inappropriate development, but also not by inappropriate acts of anti-development.

Such studies are recommended to be carried out across different countries in order to enhance our rational understanding of the World Heritage Site designation and to evaluate what may be needed for sustainable conservation and development in a heritage landscape.

References

1. China Statistical Bureau, <http://www.tjcn.org>
2. Cultural Bureau of Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture: Report of Five Heritage Sites Were Listed as the Provincial Protected Sites (2012)
3. Cultural Bureau of Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, <http://www.xxgk.yn.gov.cn>
4. Evans, G.: Mundo Maya: from Cancun to City of Culture. World Heritage in Post-colonial Mesoamerica. In: David, H., Michael, H. (eds.) *The Politics of World Heritage: Negotiating Tourism and Conservation*, pp. 35–49. Channel View Publications (2005)
5. Fowler, P.: *Landscapes for the World, Conserving a Global Heritage*. Windgather Press Ltd., Macclesfield (2004)
6. Massey, D.: The conceptualization of place. In: Massey, D., Jess, P. (eds.) *A Place in the World: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, pp. 45–85. University Press Oxford, Oxford (1995)
7. Muir, R.: *Approaches to Landscape*. Macmillan Press Ltd, London (1999)
8. Naveh, Z., Lieberman, A.S.: *Landscape Ecology, Theory and application*. Springer (1984)
9. Ronayne, M.: Commitment, Objectivity and Accountability to Communities: Priorities for 21 Century Archaeology. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 10(4) (2009)
10. Thompson, K.J.: Post-colonial Politics and resurgent Heritage: The Development of Kyrgyzstan's Heritage Tourism Product. In: David, H., Michael, H. (eds.) *The Politics of World Heritage: Negotiating Tourism and Conservation*, pp. 90–102. Channel View Publications (2005)
11. UNESCO, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2011), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines>
12. UNESCO, 2007 World Heritage Committee, Decision-31COM 7B.11- State of conservation of World Heritage properties - Arabian Oryx Sanctuary. Decision adopted at the 31th session of the World Heritage Committee, Christchurch (2007)
13. UNESCO, 2009 World Heritage Committee, Decision-33COM 7A.26- Dresden Elbe Valley (Germany). Decision adopted at the 33th session of the World Heritage Committee, Seville (2009)
14. Wylie, J.: *Landscape*. Routledge, London (2007)
15. Yunnan Provincial Construction Department: Regulations of the Protection of World Natural Heritage Site-The Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Province. Adopted by the Yunnan People's Congress on October 24 2005 (2005)
16. Yunnan Provincial Construction Department, 2005: Regulations of the Protection of World Natural Heritage Site-The Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Province. Article 19, <http://www.ynjst.gov.cn>