The Meaning of Cultural Landscape in China
From the Perspective of Heritage Stakeholders

Dr Rouran Zhang

College of Tourism and Service Management
Nankai University
Associate Member of ICOMOS/IFLA International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes

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RESEARCH AIMS

Examine examines how the Chinese experts formulated the nomination dossier, and explore their purposes in seeking World Heritage listing and their understanding of Cultural Landscape.

Explore how the discourses of Chinese tourists and local communities construct World Heritage and Cultural Landscape values through in-depth interview and observation.

Explore tensions between tourists, local community, national experts and international authorities.
METHOD

- Documentary Sources Analysis
- Case Study Survey
- Interview
Documentary Sources Analysis

- Provincial and local laws, regulations and strategies
- Nomination Dossier of West Lake
- ICOMOS Report for the West Lake Cultural Landscape
Map of the West Lake
Semi-Structured Interview

**Officials from national governments**

- Two directors from the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MHURD) and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) (Coded GO001 and GO002 respectively)

**Officials from local government of Hangzhou**

- Two officials from the Cultural Heritage Monitoring and Management Centre of West Lake who were in charge of the World Heritage application and management issues. (the director of the centre coded as WL140; the other government official coded as WL141)

**Experts**

- Two vice-directors (WL142&WL143) from the Institute of Architectural History under supervision of the China Architecture Design and Research Group
Questionnaire

1. How do you personally understand world heritage?
2. What do you think about the UNESCO world heritage program?
3. What were the reasons given for encouraging the local governments at West Lake/ in applying for World Heritage status?
4. Were there any difficulties during the listing process?
5. Has World Heritage listing brought any changes to the site?
6. Did local communities participate during the listing process of West Lake?
7. How important is tourism to local communities associated with the site?
8. What is your perspective on tourism and tourists?
9. How would you characterise the relationship between tourism and heritage at this site?
10. Has WHL brought any changes of the management policies of the sites, and if so how?

Additional questions were asked during interview in response to issues raised by the interviewee.
Structured Interview

Domestic Tourists

- Interviews on site with domestic tourists were undertaken during November 2013 and February 2014. With sixty-four domestic tourists were interviewed. 51.6% (33) were male and 48.4% (31) were female. Those aged 25-34 were the most frequent (50%) age group encountered, followed by aged 18-24 (23.4%). The educational attainment of most visitors was high, with 68.3% of visitors having some level of university education. Of thirty-six (56.3%) domestic tourists this was their first visit to West Lake, while twenty-nine (43.7%) were return visitors.

Local residents

- Of those sixty-nine local residents interviewed at West Lake, over half of those surveyed were male (56.5% to 43.5% female). Those aged 18-34 were the most frequent (52.2%) age group encountered, followed by people over 65 (21.7%). The majority of locals (71%) frequently spend time at West Lake, while 29% did not come to the site very often. Nearly half (46.4%) of the locals interviewed use West Lake as their 'city park', a place for recreation or enjoying nature.
Questionnaire

• How do you personally understand world heritage?
• What do you think about the UNESCO world heritage program?
• What were the reasons given for encouraging the local governments at West Lake in applying for World Heritage status?
• Were there any difficulties during the listing process?
• Has World Heritage listing brought any changes to the site?
• Did local communities participate during the listing process of West Lake?
• How important is tourism to local communities associated with the site?
• What is your perspective on tourism and tourists?
• How would you characterise the relationship between tourism and heritage at this site?
• Has WHL brought any changes of the management policies of the sites, and if so how?

Additional questions were asked during interview in response to issues raised by the interviewee.
Questionnaire

- What are your reasons for visiting West Lake?
- Were your expectations met?
- What experiences do you value on visiting this site?
- What messages about the heritage or history of the site do you take away?
- What does world heritage mean to you?
- What categories of world heritage do you think makes up West Lake?
- What do you understand the meaning of cultural landscape to be?
- Do you think it is important that this site is on the World Heritage List?
- Is tourism important to you?
- What is the relationship between tourism and heritage?
- What do you think of the tourism management of the site?
- Did you come before it was a World Heritage site, if so have there been any changes to the site? (for returning tourists)
- What do you think of those changes? (for returning tourists)
- Is there anything you would like to add or tell me?
World Heritage as a Game: Chinese authorities VS International Organisations
'Criterion (ii): The improved landscape of West Lake can be seen to reflect Buddhist ideals imported into China from India such as 'Buddhist peacefulness' and 'nature as paintings', and in turn it had a major influence on landscape design in East Asia. Its causeways, islands, bridges, temples, pagodas and well defined views, were widely copied over China, notably in the summer Palace at Beijing and in Japan. The notion of ten poetically named scenic places persisted for seven centuries all over China and also spread to the Korean peninsula after the 16th century, when Korean intellectuals made visits to the West Lake.

Criterion (iii): The West Lake landscape is an exceptional testimony to the very specific cultural tradition of improving landscapes to create a series of 'pictures' that reflect what was seen as a perfect fusion between people and nature, a tradition that evolved in the Tang and Song Dynasties and has continued its relevance to the present day. The 'improved' West Lake, with its exceptional array of man-made causeways, islands, bridges, gardens, pagodas and temples, against a backdrop of the wooded hills, can be seen as an entity that manifests this tradition in an outstanding way.

Criterion (vi): The Tang and Song culture of demonstrating harmony between man and nature by improving the landscape to create pictures of great beauty, captured by artists and given names by poets, is highly visible in the West Lake Landscape, with its islands, causeways, temples, pagodas and ornamental planting. The value of that tradition has persisted for seven centuries in West Lake and has spread across China and into Japan and Korea, turning it into a tradition of outstanding significance.’ (WHC website, 2011).
Zhang knows the city has come a long way in helping the West Lake get recognized by the WHC. He remembered the first time the West Lake made a bid several years ago and how a European World Heritage expert had told him: "There are thousands of lakes like that in my hometown."

China Daily 2011
World Heritage Process as a ‘Game’

I think the concept of World heritage is a kind of game, which means a process for world heritage listing. This game has been changing and evolving in recent decades. It is the responsibility of UNESCO, ICOMOS and IUCN to improve the game rules. The thing we need to consider is to adapt the new rules and how to use the international policy to our site. That is what I need to keep in mind.

(WL140, The director from the Cultural Heritage Monitoring and Management Centre of West Lake)
The listing process is an absolutely hard task. We have to be familiar with the WHC, The Operational Guideline. We also have to research what are the Western heritage experts' and World Heritage Committee's consideration for successful listing sites. It is really a tough process. For example, a Western heritage examiner from Norway who represented the advisory body ICOMOS came to West Lake. During his visiting, he mentioned that it was just a normal lake that can be found anywhere in the world, and in particular in his hometown. At first, it is very hard to explain to him a Chinese understanding of West Lake. His background is based on the Western ideology, and he had confused the OUV we tried to explain. Therefore, we have done many seminars and discussions with both Chinese and Western experts in order to find a way that Western experts could understand what we try to express. We also have strictly based the nomination on the Operational Guideline's definition of Cultural Landscape that represents the "combined works of nature and of man" to explain OUV of West Lake and its authenticity and integrity. Finally, the Western experts (including that Norwegian expert from ICOMOS) and the World Heritage Committee recognised the outstanding values of West Lake. I do not know how much they understand, nevertheless West Lake has inscribed on the WHL.

WL141, an official from Cultural Heritage Monitoring and Management Centre of West Lake
‘How to translate the meaning of West Lake to the world’
GO002: Actually, you cannot imagine the pressures and challenges we faced. West Lake of Hangzhou is the first Cultural Landscape type of World Heritage in China. West Lake decided to apply as a Cultural Landscape at the very early stages of the World Heritage application process. There are three reasons we supported this application. Firstly, we are confident that West Lake has OUV at an international level. Secondly, West Lake represents Chinese traditional culture merged with its outstanding urban landscape architectures. Thirdly, the local government has paid great efforts for inscribing West Lake, which includes developing the West Lake Protection and Management Project. In addition, Hangzhou citizens also had enthusiasm for the World Heritage application. You know, the reputation of West Lake is great in China. We worried about that our understanding of West Lake cannot be recognised by Western experts and scholars. Local governments have done lots of research in order to translate the meaning of West Lake into OUV that Western experts could understand. It is a very hard process. For instance, one of the Ten Poetically Named Scenic Places '断桥残雪 Lingering Snow on Broken Bridge' has three folder meanings that were very hard to explain to Western experts. As for what kind of beauty or what Chinese ideology of the sites, they may not understand, unless they grow up in the Chinese southern culture background. Nevertheless, UNESCO understood that West Lake represents the Chinese understanding of landscape and perspectives of beauty.

Go002, a director from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage
World Heritage Process as a ‘Game’

...It is a long process. At first, our position of assessing heritage value of West Lake was based on our traditional recognition of a Chinese landscape, rather than considered from an international view. Therefore, we had carefully researched the criteria and standards of the WH program. When we re-abstrated and re-formulated the heritage values of West Lake from our earlier works, we always keep in mind that our view should be based on a global perspective.

WL143, a vice-director from Institute of Architectural History
The cultural diversity of West Lake
National Discourse VS International Discourse

West Lake is an exceptional testimony to the development and passing down of ancient and enduring Chinese cultures and traditions such as those of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, loyalty and filial piety, hermitage life, book collection, Tea-Zen and sphragistics (the making of seals).

ICOMOS 2011:145

ICOMOS does not consider that West Lake can be seen to be outstanding as an exceptional testimony to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as more extensive and important manifestations of these can be found in other landscapes. It also does not consider that a case has been made for the landscape being seen as an exceptional representation of loyalty and filial piety, hermitage life, book collection, Tea-Zen and sphragistics (the making of seals)

ICOMOS 2011:145
I doubt with ICOMOS judgement because they did not mention any example in the ICOMOS report. Obviously, Western people did not understand the importance of cultural diversity of West Lake.

WL142, vice-director from the Institute of Architectural History
Tourists' Discourse

1) Loyalty and filial piety
Yue Fei is my idol. [...] I thought it was a shame that the King in the Southern Song Dynasty killed such a hero, a good person [Yue Fei]. Why did such a glorious Kingdom [Southern Song Dynasty] decay? I think the leader of a country is significant for the past and present.

(WL064, male, 35-44, tourist)

2) Buddhism and Taoism
I come to Linyin Temple because I respect Buddha, I am not a Buddhist, however, I think I could be influenced by the spirit of Buddha, to be a peaceful, kind person.

(WL102, male, 25-34, tourist)

3) Tea-Zen culture
Sit on the edge of the lake and taste Longjing Tea, then I can feel the beauty of West Lake.

(WL090, female, 35-44, tourist)
I think nature and culture have merged together for a long time [at West Lake]. Take Leifeng Pagoda as an example, it has a long and profound history. The origin of this pagoda is that it was built in 977 AD. during the Wuyue Kingdom. It was a Buddhist pagoda, and built for Buddhist reasons or maybe built for one of the imperial concubines. Leifeng Pagoda is located in the middle of the bridge of Xizhao Hill, face to the lake, and absolutely beautiful scenes. The design of the pagoda and its location reflect the Chinese traditional '风水Fengshui' concept. The pagoda has been changed during different periods with profound stories and culture. You can find many poems and stories written for the pagoda.

(WL027, male, 25-34, tourist)

There are thirty-six West Lake’s in China, but why does the West Lake located in Hangzhou seem to be the most famous? It is because of its history and culture. When I walk around the lake, there are always some historical things that attract me. Being in the SU, and Bai crossway, I automatically feel the atmosphere of the Tang and Song period, and I am interested to search the reasons that why Su dongpo and Bai Juyi built them. It is interesting.
The integrity of West Lake
National Discourse VS International Discourse

Although the nomination dossier suggests that the tea growing area is part of the nature that is linked to the beauty of the lake, the reality is that the tea plantations are almost all hidden from the lake at the back of the hills on the western side and do not contribute to the viewscape of any of the ten views. They cannot be considered as contributing to Outstanding Universal Value – although the hills that rise above them form part of the backdrop of the lake. The revised boundary suggested by the State Party that excludes the major areas of tea plantations is satisfactory.

ICOMOS 2011:145

We have debated many times with experts from ICOMOS, and we have done a lot of research to prove that the Longjing Tea Garden is inseparable from the West Lake. In the end, most international experts consider Longjing Tea Garden to be in full compliance with OUV standards, however, we had been forced to remove Longjing Tea plantation area because of the subjectively unapproved relationship of the chairman of the expert group. We had no choice because we have paid too much for the West Lake nomination, if we don't modify it on time, we will lose the chance of World Heritage inscription.

WL142, vice-director from the Institute of Architectural History
On 15 December 2010, ICOMOS requested the State Party to consider modifications to the boundaries of the property to exclude the tea plantations and their villages. The State Party responded on 22nd February with two suggestions for boundary modifications and again on 4th March with a further three suggestions, plans A, B and C. These further details are reflected in this report.

ICOMOS 2011:145
Locals' Discourse

I think one of the key reasons that West Lake inscribed on the World Heritage list is international experts who have tasted our Longjing tea[smile].

(WL094, male, over 65, local)

West Lake without Longjing Tea Garden is like a beautiful woman losing her unique characteristic and becoming mediocre.

(WL095, male, 25-34, local)

Lu Yu’s *The Book of Tea* [published around 758] recorded the Longjing tea as the earliest tea monograph in the world, and Longjing tea culture has been constantly developed in each Chinese dynasty.[...]It is significant to the cultural integrity of West Lake, and enable West Lake inscribed on the World Heritage list.

(WL097, female, 25-34, local)
West Lake is a changing landscape
National Discourse VS International Discourse

West Lake has been constantly evolving from Tang and Song Dynasties to the present day, representing a typical example of people’s effective use of water resources for thousands of years... West Lake Landscape is an outstanding example of using an ancient lagoon to create beautiful scenery, which have significantly improved the living environment. It has been serving the ecological, cultural and tourism functions for the city of Hangzhou in the face of rapid process of urbanization.

SACH, 2011:17

ICOMOS does however not consider that West Lake can be seen as an evolving landscape. The process of creation and evolution of West Lake spanned from the Tang to the Qing dynasties, after which the key aspects of the landscape have been restored and consolidated. The cultural climate within which the landscape was created was the classical literary and artistic culture of these Imperial Dynasties. Of course the landscape has to a degree evolved since, but its significance relates to the creativity of the Imperial dynasties.

ICOMOS 2011:145
Locals' Discourse

I think cultural heritage does not just reflect the past, you know, West Lake was a natural lagoon, it has been changed to be such a meaningful place because for more than a thousand years it has been worked on by people. West Lake is still changing now.

(WL007, female, over 65, local)

I think, compared to the landscape in Suzhou, West Lake is changing in a different period. The new Xixi National Wetland Park is a recent development of West Lake. In general, West Lake is a combination of culture and nature, and culture dominates nature.

(WL030, female, 45-54, local)

WL033: You know, without Bai Juyi, Sun Dongpo, Yang Gong, and other people who were in charge of the management of West Lake, there would be no such beautiful place today. Every generation has contributed to the development of West Lake. We are also making our contribution. In recent decades, there is a project that has used the sludge dug from West Lake to create a new wetland Park, Jiang Yangfan Park (Fig. 2 &3).

WL034: Well, this is a part of the West Lake Protection and Management Project. It is still unfinished and with very little tourists.

WL032: I think this is a new development of West Lake, with the contemporary technology and modern design.

WL033: I agree, in addition, West Lake has become larger than before, in particular the Mao Jiabu area because of the protection project. In different times people would do something for West Lake (Fig.4&5).

(WL032, WL033 and WL034, female, 24-34, local)
Source from The Hangzhou government
unpublished material
Emotional feeling associate with ‘the notion of ten poetically named scenic places’
The notion of ten poetically named scenic places
Feeling

...[T]he meaning of '断桥残雪 Lingering Snow on Broken Bridge' reflects the scenery on a sunny day after heavy snow, the snow on the bridge melts and shows the brown floor, which gives people a feeling that the chain is broken.

(WL043, male, 25-34, tourist)
You need to take your time during your visit to West Lake. Otherwise, you won’t be able to understand the in-depth meaning of the site. For example, if you visit 三潭印月 Three Pools Mirroring the Moon in a rush, you might think they are just three normal sculptures. However, if you come to the site during the moonlit night, take your time to feel the place, you will suddenly understand how wise and romantic that our ancestor named it. Just like Longjin tea, if you drink it very quickly you never know how good the tea is. (WL093, local, male, over 65, retired)
WL089: On the Broken Bridge and Leifeng Pagoda. I am thinking of the moment Su Dongpo and Baijuyi were writing poetry, and I am right there drinking [wine] with them.
WL064: Yue Fei is my idol. I just watched a TV show called ‘The Patriot Yue Fei’, and I watched several times, every time I dissolved in tears. I thought it was a shame that the King in the Southern Song Dynasty killed such a hero, a good person [Yue Fei]. Why did such a glorious Kingdom [Southern Song Dynasty] decay? I think the leader of a country is significant for the past and present. (WL064, tourist, male, 35-44, undergraduate, engineer, from Taiwan)
WL038: During my visit, I remembered some stories and histories I already knew before. For example, I was feeling about the scenes of the White Snake TV show when I passed through the broken bridge (Fig. 7.4).

WL039: Yes, you can remember many stories or histories by visiting. In my opinion, the landscape design is very different from the Netherlands, while the concepts of the design are more straightforward, even a little bit boring from the Dutch perspective, the landscape design of West Lake is more complicated. For example, you can see the Su Crossway [from where] we are standing, and that is not straightforward (Fig. 7.5). Some parts are winding and covered by vegetation. You cannot see through until you come close. Each part of the Crossway, the artificial rock, and even vegetation has stories. In addition, the ancient landscape architects were so smart. Their design reflects the Chinese traditional philosophy and the innate link between nature and people and is much better than the contemporary landscape design in China. (WL038, tourist, female, 25-34, postgraduate, landscape architect, from the Netherlands; WL039, tourist, male, 25-34, postgraduate, landscape architect, from the Netherlands)

WL042: The story of ‘White Snake’ is the first thing that comes to my mind. When I was at Broken Bridge and Leifeng Pagoda, I felt very romantic, because of Xu Xian and Bai Niangzi's story. (WL042, tourist, female, 18-24, postgraduate, from Beijing)
新白娘子传奇

幸運緣 嘖捲連
千年修得共船渡 百年修得共枕眠
千年修等 只願終笙愛一回
Translate Chinese Values Into ‘OUV’
Chinese Value

Su Causeway in the Morning of Spring, silk scroll, 23.9cm×20.2cm, by Ye Xiaoyan, Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), collection of National Palace Museum in Taipei

Source: West Lake Nomination Dossier

Zhang, R & Taylor, K (in prepare), Feel for Cultural Landscape Discourses from Tourists and Local Residents, *Landscape Research*.

Autumn Moon over the Calm Lake, by Qi Min, Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

Breeze-ruffled Lotus at Winding Garden, by Qi Min, Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Thank you!